# Hillside Hermitage — Collected Essays

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# Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

## Seeing Beneath the Surface

By Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

> *Bhikkhus*, these seven perceptions or contexts, when developed and frequently practiced, are of great fruit and great benefit. They are included in the deathless and bring the deathless to its conclusion.
>
> What seven?
>
> 1-The *saññā* (perception, context) of the non-beautiful,
>
> 2- the context of death,
>
> 3- the context of the loathsomeness of eating,
>
> 4- the context of non-delight in regard to the whole world,
>
> 5- the context of *anicca*,
>
> 6- the context of *dukkha* in *anicca*,
>
> 7- the context of*anattā*in *dukkha*.
>
> These seven contexts, when developed and frequently practiced, are of great fruit and great benefit. They are included in the deathless and bring the deathless to its conclusion.
>
> 1- When the context of the non-beautiful is developed and frequently practiced, it is of great fruit and great benefit. That is what I said and in reference to what, was it said?
>
> When a *bhikkhu* becomes accustomed to the context of non-beautiful, and often lives with such an intent, his mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse, and either *upekkhā* or the counterpart, other shore (*patikūla*), gets established.
>
> Just as a chicken's feather thrown into the fire shrinks back and shrivels. In the same way, a *bhikkhu* whose mind is accustomed to the context of non-beautiful, and often lives with such an intent, his mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse.
>
> If a *bhikkhu* whose mind is accustomed to the context of non-beautiful aims at sexual intercourse or does not have the counterpart established, he should know: "for me the context of non-beautiful is not developed, for me there is no difference in former distinction, for me there is no strong development." In that way he knows.
>
> If, when a *bhikkhu* becomes accustomed to the context of non-beautiful, and often lives with such an intent, his mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse, and either *upekkhā* or the counterpart gets established. He should know: "for me the context of non-beautiful is well developed, for me there is a difference in former distinction, for me there is a strong development." In that way he considers.

> *Bhikkhus*, when the context of the non-beautiful is developed and frequently practiced, it is of great fruit and great benefit. It brings the deathless to its culmination and conclusion…
>
> – *An 7.49*

The practice of *asubha* is about attending to the ugly context or non-beautiful side of a beautiful thing, rather than attending to something else that is ugly. You need to see through the beautiful thing to the other side of it, which is simultaneously present; otherwise the attraction to the beautiful will not be stopped. This is because the attraction to beauty is not in the beauty itself, but in how you perceive it.

Many people try to practice *asubha* by getting rid of the beautiful and replacing it with some other ugly thing. This approach treats the two as separate entities rather than recognizing the presence of both within the same phenomenon, and implies blaming the beautiful for any disturbance. But by doing so, you fail to see that the problem is actually in your attitude towards it.

The right approach is to attend to the beautiful things correctly when they arise; with the right attention, and discern their opposite side or counterpart that is implicitly present in the background. This way, you can see through the beauty and realize that it is just 'less ugly'. Such a context then serves as a basis for the relinquishing of passion towards the beautiful.

Even if you are not currently engaging in sensual pleasure, as long as you maintain the view that pleasure is valuable, you are keeping the basis for future lust to arise. Only if you fully understand the danger in sensual gratification can you free yourself from sensuality once and for all. Developing the context of danger means discerning the implicit characteristics of what you are attending, with the chief characteristic being the danger. By discerning the implicit danger long enough, you will not need to maintain that context because it is not something that you create, but rather it is something that you uncover.

> 2-…When a *bhikkhu* becomes accustomed to the context of death, their mind draws back from attachment to life, and either *upekkhā* or the counterpart gets established…(continues as above)

The counterpart of life: death, is always present in that negative sense, even if you don't attend to it. If you understand this, you will experience disenchantment with life, and it will be impossible for you to remain attracted to it. Passion towards life is not the product of life itself. It comes from thinking or having a view that life is in your control, from feeling like it will not end or will last forever, i.e ignoring the context of death. By removing these misconceptions, you remove the basis for passion towards life. You don't need to seek out death or the possibility of death because it's already here.

You also don't need to deny life to remove misconceptions about it. It is the same principle as how you can 'get rid of' sensual thoughts indirectly: when a sensual thought arises, you must not welcome it or entertain it. And by enduring it long enough, the thought will eventually go away.

Similarly, you can free yourself from death by seeing the danger in life and thus indirectly removing the slightest passion towards it. By removing passion towards life, you remove the basis for death to apply to you any longer. Then, when this body falls apart, you will not be appearing anywhere else because you have severed any bond with the entire domain of *saṃsāra*.

> 3-…When a *bhikkhu* becomes accustomed to the context of the loathsomeness of eating, their mind draws back from craving for taste, and either *upekkhā*or the counterpart gets established…

When you eat, your default mode is to prioritize the pleasure of eating. You put taste first, even when you're starving. You may not even realize that you're doing this, but you are automatically eating out of pleasure rather than out of necessity. The evidence for this is the fact that you eat even when you are not hungry.

However, there is another side to eating: the fact that it's something you have to do. It's a necessity, not just a source of pleasure. When you take this necessity for granted and cover it up with delight in eating, you become picky and start preferring certain tastes over others. But no matter how much you prioritize taste and delight in food, cooking and recipes, the fact remains that you still need to eat – you are subjected to that physical need. Whether you enjoy your food or not makes no difference to that situation on which your life depends.

> "Hunger is the foremost illness; Determinations are the foremost dis-ease. For one knowing this, as it really is; *Nibbāna*is the foremost ease."
>
> – Dhp 203

This is a reminder that hunger is a significant affliction. By ignoring, or simply being unaware of the pressure and unpleasantness of being subjected to the necessity of eating, you end up putting the pleasure and taste first. But if you acknowledge the fact that food is a necessity that you must fulfill, then whether you're starving or not, you can keep the context of why you need to eat in mind. Regardless of how enjoyable or unpleasant the eating experience may be, it still stems from the unpleasant fact of hunger which you are subjected to.

So by seeing the necessity of food as primary and taste as secondary, you can become dispassionate towards taste without trying to suppress it through various techniques. You can still taste something agreeable, but no amount of agreeable or disagreeable taste will disturb your mind or pervert the right order of putting first what is second and second what is first: taste always comes second to hunger. So if there is no need for food, you would not engage with it. And through recognising hunger as the foremost illness and that determinations (that determine our life – such as the necessity of food) as the foremost dis-ease, you can understand that *Nibbāna*, or the state of liberation, is the foremost ease.

> 4-…When a *bhikkhu* becomes accustomed to the context of non-delight in regard to the whole world, their mind draws back from the various beautiful things in the world, and either *upekkhā* or the counterpart gets established…

This context is developed by recognizing the danger of delight. The perception of non-delight is for the uprooting of the inherent delight or joy in regard to the world, senses and sense objects.

The word 'delight' refers to that subtle attitude of acceptance or looking forward to something; things that are pleasing and agreeable. Agreeable things are not a problem in themselves. The problem is you being unable to *not* delight in the prospect of pleasure. That is where the danger is.

And so, delight itself is what renders you blind to the inherent danger in being bound to delighting in agreeable and pleasant things. If you genuinely apprehend and recognise that danger, it is impossible to continue to delight in, or be attracted to those things.

'Non-delight' does not mean you must hate beautiful things. You simply do not take up the pleasure in them anymore. If something is agreeable, you acknowledge it as such, but there is no sense of taking up the pleasure i.e delighting. Similarly, if something is disagreeable, you recognize it as such, but there is no resistance to it.

Also, you can't simply create a lack of delight out of thin air. The only way to practice non-delight is by intentionally preventing yourself from delighting. This involves contemplating and acknowledging the potential dangers that come with the things that bring you pleasure. By consistently cultivating such a state of non-delight over time, you won't have to continually remind yourself of the dangers, because they have always been a natural part of those things. This is why freedom from those things is possible in the first place.

Merely saying no to pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches, doesn't automatically grant you a true understanding of delight. You have the ability to restrain yourself and let go of non-essential experiences, based on understanding that the pleasure they bring can be detrimental. But there are certain things, such as eating, that you cannot completely avoid. Even the Buddha, during his time as a *bodhisatta*, attempted to starve himself in the belief that it would lead to ultimate freedom, and came to realize that this approach was incorrect. The issue was never the food itself: it is your attachment to the delight derived from it that binds you to the aimless wanderings of *saṃsāra*.

> 5-…When a *bhikkhu* becomes accustomed to the context of *anicca*, their mind draws back from acquisitions, honors, and fame, and either *upekkhā* or the counterpart gets established…

The counterpart to acquisition, ownership, honors, and fame is the understanding of non-ownership, the realization that possession is impossible—this is *anicca*. *Anicca* signifies change, but simply stating "everything is changing" lacks a personal connection. You need to perceive your own *anicca*: your experiences, ownership, body, senses, feelings, and life are all *subject to change*. If seeing *anicca* were to mean seeing a thing disappear, you would have to be dead to understand that life is *anicca*, but then that understanding would not be possible. Here lies the essence of the matter: recognizing that something is "subject to change" implies that the potential for change is inherent within it, even as the thing itself remains unchanged.

So, to grasp that things are subject to change and subject to suffering you should not wait for circumstances to transform before attempting to understand *anicca*. You need to seek understanding while things are still circumstantially stable and while your life is present. You want to comprehend that change is an inherent aspect, an intrinsic characteristic of anything that has arisen.

The nature of change reveals the nature of non-mastery, non-ownership, and the impossibility of control. While things are manifested, you can exert some level of influence and control. You have agency in your life at this moment. However, fundamentally, you will lose that influence when life itself decides to change—when you begin to experience the decline of your physical body or when you pass away.

Acquisitions, honors, and fame all contribute to the escalation of one's sense of self. In the process of practice, a person initially focuses on eliminating the most obvious forms of conceit, such as sensuality and anger. However, as the practice deepens, one gradually relinquishes subtler acquisitions related to nationality, lineage, family, cultural affiliations, and so on.

Being popular is inherently desired and favored by people, while obscurity and insignificance is inherently disliked. This is what leads people to defensively react to criticism, even when there is no rational basis for it. Yet all of that concern around reputation and self-image is built upon the appropriation of those simple things that are so close that they are taken for granted: your feelings, your experience as a whole. So if one learns to recognise the impermanence of experience at this basic, intimate level, one will naturally develop a discerning mind that sees through any social pressures.

Rather than merely acknowledging the impermanence of things in general, right contemplation involves recognizing that our present experience arises from the functioning of our body and senses: these five aggregates. Despite having some agency in our actions and decisions, we fundamentally lack control over the changing nature of these aggregates. Our entire domain of control is intertwined with their impermanence, and when they change, our sense of control and the world we have constructed will be swept away. By recognising this through your present experience, you can understand that even what is currently within your control, is *subject to change.* And that's enough: you don't have to wait for external changes or seek 'proof' of impermanence in particular things. You simply need to refrain from unwholesome actions in regard to things, and based on this, discern that those things have impermanence (*anicca)* as their inherent nature, whether you want it or not. Diligently cultivating and maintaining that context would result in the complete fading away of acquisitions, dependence on honors, fame, and notions of conceit.

When you cultivate the understanding of *anicca* and let go of attachments, criticism from others will no longer upset your mind. You become unconcerned with what people think of you, whether their judgments are fair or unfair. The irrational fear of blame no longer distorts your perspective. The pressure to shape others' perception of you, rooted in conceit, also dissipates. You come to realize that you cannot control others' opinions. While many people grasp this concept intellectually, the true transformation occurs when you emotionally detach from the need for validation and are undisturbed by blame or criticism. You maintain clarity in understanding the intentions behind someone's criticism and can objectively assess if there is validity in their points. If you were indeed wrong, you have no issue acknowledging and rectifying it, as you are not irrationally defending your own conceited ownership. Likewise, when baseless criticism arises, you recognize its absurdity, falsehood, or irrelevance. There is no pressure to correct or ensure everyone knows the truth. You remain grounded in your understanding and are free from the burden of rectifying the world to fit a particular perception.

> 6-…When a *bhikkhu* becomes accustomed to the context of *dukkha* in *anicca*, an acute context of danger becomes settled in him toward indolence, laziness, slackness, heedlessness, lack of effort,

and unreflectiveness, just as one would have fear towards one's executioner with a drawn-out sword…

The context of danger needs to be established: the context that change of an unfavorable kind can occur at any time. Once you recognise the weight of that situation, you will feel the discomfort which is inherent in the fact that your very being is not your own. In other words, if you recognise *anicca* correctly, you will be recognising the inherent discomfort of your situation – the *dukkha* will become apparent. And the clearer that context is, the more of a 'sense of urgency' will develop.

> 7-…When a *bhikkhu* becomes accustomed to the context of *anattā*in what is *dukkha*, his mind is devoid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit regarding this conscious body and all external objects; he has overcome all measurements due to conceiving, is peaceful and well liberated…

"Measurements due to conceiving" means what you conceive you appropriate. You are measured and defined by the things you appropriate (take as "mine"), such as your form, feelings, perceptions, intentions and consciousness. When those things change, you are thus affected. Removal of the conceivings on the other hand, means that whatever happens with the things you used to conceive will not affect you anymore. You will no longer be *measured* by it.

## There's No Love In Loving-kindness

***By Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero***

**Q:** Our recent discussions have centred around cultivating the Brahmavihāras. From my perspective, it's crucial to differentiate and comprehend each of the four components of an unobstructed Brahmavihāra mind – namely, *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* – individually. But only after establishing and stabilising *mettā*, can one start discerning *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* 'one by one'.

**Nm:** Instead of saying that it's developed 'one by one' it is more accurate to say that it's developed 'one within the other'. Through understanding what *mettā* is, you understand the principle of all four Brahmavihāras. Then within that understanding and development of *mettā*, you can develop *karuṇā*, and within *karuṇā*, you get to build *muditā;* which then results in the fulfilment of *upekkhā*. You don't abandon *mettā* to develop *karuṇā*, or *karuṇā* to develop *muditā*, nor do you leave all three to develop *upekkhā*. *Upekkhā* encompasses them all. But to arrive at it, you have to go "through" them all. *Upekkhā* is founded upon *mettā*. It's the same in terms of *jhana*; if you keep following the principle of the first *jhana*, you will arrive at the fourth.

**Q:** Regarding mettā specifically, it refers to an attitude of non-aversion rather than engaging in friendly social interactions or cultivating forms of love.

**Nm:** Correct. The framework of *Brahmavihāra* centres on cultivating a mind of non-aversion. This means that even when encountering unpleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or touches, one does not have ill will towards them. The focus is on prioritising the protection of the mind of non-aversion, regardless of the content of one's everyday experience.

**Q:** This differs from popular ideas of *mettā* practice, which usually consist of generating love and sending it in various directions.

**Nm:** The problem with this is that such a practice will not uproot craving, which is why that is not what is meant by the description of *mettā* in the suttas. People prefer that method because it is more palpable, and 'nicer,' and it's certainly a helpful way of relating to people. In any case, it is better to think of people with loving kindness rather than hatred, because if you are not hating them, then more often than not they will not hate you back; which will help you out at that societal level. So I am not saying that you shouldn't do it – by all means think positively about everyone, but don't mistake that for practising the Dhamma.

It is dangerous to rely on personal feelings as the basis for one's practice: simply because something makes you feel good, does not necessarily mean that it is the practice of Dhamma. Our emotions are shaped by our *resistance to* or *indulgence in* certain behaviours or experiences, and therefore, they cannot be relied upon to

determine what is wholesome or unwholesome. So it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the Buddha's concept of metta, understand its deeper meaning and practise it with wisdom and discernment, rather than relying on subjective feelings.

The term *mettā* refers to the general framework or *mind of non-aversion*. It is important to emphasise this because one may not harbour aversion towards someone in particular, but still hold hatred towards another, indicating the lack of *mettā* in one's general mindset. Even if one does not hate anyone specifically, the absence of that particular aversion alone does not signify the development of *mettā*. To truly cultivate this mindset, one must make a conscious effort to abandon all *possibility* of aversion in all directions and protect and maintain that, regardless of the circumstances or the people they encounter. Thus, it's about removing the possibility of aversion, not the possibility of meeting disagreeable and unpleasant people and experiences.

The choice to prioritise immediate circumstances over the mind of non-aversion is a choice to abandon the framework necessary for the development of *mettā*. By protecting and cherishing the general mindset like a mother would protect her child, as stated in the *Mettā sutta*, one will prevent actions that stem from a mind of aversion, and thus protect all living beings as well.

Also, it is essential to note that the development of *mettā* does not result in having *love* for all: it leads to the development of *upekkhā*, or equanimity, which is the ability to maintain an unshakable mind toward all things without attachments.

**Q:** Love breeds infatuation, not equanimity.

**Nm:** Yes, and it also makes you susceptible to aversion, fear, and anxiety, because now you depend on it emotionally and existentially.

**Q:** So if you can't see the direct connection between *mettā* and *upekkhā*, your definition of *mettā* needs redefining. And in terms of *karunā*, how can we get to that stage?

**Nm:** You just have to take the same principle of *mettā* a step further. Initially, when encountering something disagreeable, one may feel aversion towards it. Then, one can develop a mind of non-aversion towards the unpleasant, but there may still be some resistance. By further developing the mind of non-aversion, one begins to refine the *principle of non-resistance* that underlies all four *Brahmavihāra*. That non-resistance is the abandoning of craving, cruelty, and any conflict.

**Q:** Regarding whatever is felt, pleasant or unpleasant: if it's unpleasant, you should practise non-resistance. And if it's pleasant, you must not be trying to possess it?

**Nm:** People are inclined to pursue pleasant things because there is a simultaneous resistance to the pain of desire. The urge for pleasure stems from an aversion to one's current state. One resists even pleasure and desires to change it when it isn't sufficient (and it never is for one who craves it). Therefore, by cultivating *Brahmavihāra*, one can overcome sensuality too, which involves resistance.

**Q:** Maintaining a peaceful mind towards all *feelings* is the core practice.

**Nm:** Yes.

**Q:** With the *Brahmavihāra* practice, you cannot hurt anyone…

**Nm:** …because the intention to hurt, to engage in sensuality, or to be cruel, is always rooted in resisting whatever you are feeling at the time. Unwholesome actions require *resistance to feeling* as their necessary condition.

**Q:** Moreover, when individuals have established and stabilised their mind in *mettā* and *karunā,* a sense of contentment arises within them, irrespective of the feeling experienced. This contentment is known as *muditā*.

Then, a Bhikkhu might say thus: 'I have developed and cultivated the liberation of the mind by *muditā*, made it my vehicle and basis, carried it out, consolidated it, and properly undertaken it, yet discontent still obsesses my mind.'He should be told: 'Not so! Do not speak thus. Do not misrepresent the Blessed One; for

it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would certainly not speak in such a way. It is impossible and inconceivable, friend, that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by *muditā*, make it one's vehicle and basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet discontent could still obsess one's mind. There is no such possibility. For this, friend is the escape from discontent, namely, the liberation of the mind by *muditā*. **– An6.13**

**Nm**: 'Altruistic joy,' which is the usual translation of muditā, is not accurate. Muditā stems from the principle we're discussing here of non-resistance and non-contention towards others and whatever circumstances arise; safeguarding your mind of benevolence, which harms no other being. The result is that the mind becomes imperturbable to any circumstance.

So as a sense of joy, it's similar to the joy you get in *jhana* – joy that you're secluded and unaffected, free of concern regarding the entire world. You can see how equanimity regarding good or bad is developed from that.

**Q:** Another description of *muditā* can be found in An 3.95:

And what is the harmonious assembly? Here, the assembly in which the bhikkhus dwell in concord, harmoniously, without disputes, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with eyes of affection, is called the harmonious assembly.

"When the bhikkhus dwell in concord, harmoniously, without disputes, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with eyes of affection, on that occasion, they generate much merit. On that occasion, the bhikkhus dwell in a divine abode, that is, in the liberation of the mind through muditā. When one is content, *pīti* (happiness) arises. For one with a happy mind, the body becomes calm. One calm in the body feels pleasure. For one feeling such pleasure, the mind becomes composed.

**Nm:** The best way to cultivate a friendly attitude towards all is to focus on maintaining your mind of friendliness and non-resistance towards how you feel, and then protect it as a mother protects her child. When you don't mind experiencing disagreeable feelings, it becomes inconceivable to hate the person who seemingly caused those feelings. You don't need to manage all your various individual relationships or circumstances if the *Brahmavihāra* framework is developed—quite the contrary.

You find that mental "gateway", through which other beings or circumstances have to arise and instead of chasing, managing, dealing with, or trying to prevent those circumstances, you realise, "All I need to do is protect the gateway and not lose sight of it". And you protect it by not acting out of it.

**Q:** Which results in peacefulness?

**Nm:** Peacefulness will come as a result of it, as a culmination of the absence of your resistance towards what you feel. Peace is not about *not* feeling pain. Peace is about not being disturbed by pain or being pulled by pleasures.

**Q:** Non-conflict.

**Nm:** Yes, non-conflict internally. Can you have a conflict with anybody externally without already being conflicted with what you're feeling internally? Impossible.

Trying to eliminate conflict from the external world is futile because the source of conflict is internal. It is by resolving your internal conflict that it becomes impossible for external events to disturb you, even if the whole world is conflicting with you.

**Sutta Nipāta 1.8 *Metta Sutta*:**

This is to be done by one skilled in his welfare

having fully understood the path of peace:

Let them be capable, honest and upright

Well-spoken, gentle and not boastful;
content and easy to support,
Living lightly, unbusy with duties,
Intelligent with calmed senses;
Not intrusive or greedy amongst families.

Let them not do the slightest thing
which others of wisdom would criticise.
Happy and secure,
may all beings be happy!

Whatever living creatures,
moving or unmoving, without leaving any out,
long or large, medium, short, coarse or subtle,
visible or invisible, living far or near,
those born or to be born:
May all beings be happy!

One should not deceive another, nor look
down upon anyone anywhere.
Out of anger and averse intention,
one should not wish suffering for another.

Even as a mother would protect her only
child with her life,
so too, in regard to all beings
should one protect an unlimited mind.

With benevolence (*mettā*) towards the entire world,
One should develop an unlimited mind.
Above, below, and all around,
unobstructed, friendly and without enemies.

Whether standing, walking, sitting
or lying down – while awake,
he would always remember this;
This, they say, is the way of the gods.

Being uninvolved in views,

Virtuous and accomplished with insight

Having dispelled greed for sensual pleasures,

He then never again returns to a womb.

## The Danger Contemplation

– By Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

> And how, bhikkhus, are sensual pleasures seen by a bhikkhu in such a way that as he looks at them sensual desire, sensual affection, sensual infatuation, and sensual passion do not lie latent within him in regard to sensual pleasures?
>
> Suppose there is a charcoal pit deeper than a man's height, filled with glowing coals without flame or smoke. A man would come along wanting to live, not wanting to die, desiring happiness and averse to suffering. Then two strong men would grab him by both arms and drag him towards the charcoal pit. The man would wriggle his body this way and that. For what reason? Because he knows: 'I will fall into this charcoal pit and I will thereby meet death or deadly suffering.' So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has seen sensual pleasures similar to a charcoal pit, sensual desire, sensual affection, sensual infatuation, and sensual passion do not lie latent within him in regard to sensual pleasures.
>
> And how, bhikkhus, has a bhikkhu comprehended a mode of conduct and manner of living such that evil unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure do not flow in upon him? Suppose a man would enter a thorny forest. There would be thorns in front of him, thorns behind him, thorns to his left, thorns to his right, thorns below him, thorns above him. He would go forward mindfully, he would go back mindfully, thinking, 'May no thorn prick me!' So too, bhikkhus, whatever in the world has a pleasing and agreeable nature is called a thorn in the Noble One's Discipline. Having understood this thus as 'a thorn', one should understand restraint and non-restraint. – Sn35.244

**Ajahn Nyanamoli**: In the context of the Noble Ones' discipline, where one possesses Right view and has comprehended the Four Noble Truths, it is crucial to regard every pleasure as a thorn. This means that, just as one must be careful when entering a jungle filled with thorns, one must exercise caution and attentiveness in approaching such experiences. However, the emphasis lies not on learning "how" to be cautious, but on cultivating the mindset of viewing pleasurable experiences as potential dangers. By adopting this perspective, vigilance and care will arise spontaneously, as one recognizes the potential harm that can arise from delighting in pleasure. It is imperative to note that this simile is not merely about physical caution, but about the mental attitude towards pleasure and the hazards it presents.

Merely imitating carefulness methodically is insufficient to fulfil the Noble discipline and attain Arahantship. One must learn to *view* pleasurable experiences as thorns to genuinely grasp restraint and lack of restraint. By adopting this mindset, certain perceptions develop that aid in overcoming sensual desires and attachments. Understanding the harm that pleasurable experiences pose leads to a natural sense of vigilance and mindfulness.

So, the effort one makes should not be directed towards being mindful of every physical movement or similar. Instead, one should strive to discern how to *perceive* sensuality as "burning embers" and thus turn the sense restraint into something effortless and preferable. This will be followed by dispassion and freedom from suffering and attachment. The task entails thorough and accurate reflection of recognizing the danger over and over again in things that would otherwise be the foundation for desire.

In the first simile, the mind of a Noble disciple seeks to be anywhere else in the world except in the burning pit. Similarly, when a pleasurable experience arises in the mind, if one has cultivated the perception of danger, one's mind will not want to go there. Even when it comes to eating, one should be attentive to

how they perceive the food and ensure that they do not lose their understanding of sensuality as something perilous.

**Q: Why am I unable to see the inherent danger in sensuality, even though it is a fact? What is preventing me from recognizing the danger that is present?**

Nm: Although you can state that sensuality is dangerous, if you still have passion towards it, then you have not truly understood its danger. The measure of your understanding is whether or not you are dispassionate in the face of sensuality. So, simply stating abstract facts about the danger of sensuality is not enough, as it does not reflect your actual experience. Don't confuse abstract ideas for true understanding. For example, simply acknowledging the "fact" of impermanence of everything does not necessarily mean that you have any *understanding* of it. To truly understand *anicca*, you must develop it to the point of becoming a Sotapanna.

Engaging with sensuality multiple times a day, whether it be relishing, welcoming, planning, or worrying about it, is a clear symptom of not having understood the danger of sensuality. Thus, instead of taking it as a fact, contemplate the danger repeatedly for as long as it takes for the context of its danger to become established. And then protect the context by avoiding carelessness and indulging in sensual thoughts.

**Q: How can one identify or become aware of the danger?**

Nm: Some individuals recognize the danger of excessive indulgence in sensuality. They observe the discontent that arises from indulgence, which is why many turn to religion, spirituality, and meditation. The dissatisfaction is clear, and many people can perceive it. However, how one responds to it determines if they remain trapped within the same domain or if they free themselves from it..

For others, this might not be apparent at first, so they must take refuge in the Buddha's teachings and trust that sensuality is truly dangerous and unworthy of attachment, even if it contradicts their personal experiences. This requires a commitment to maintaining virtue and practising sense restraint when agreeable sensations arise in the body and mind. Trust in the teachings enables the mind to contemplate and discern the danger of sensuality, which may not be immediately apparent to its full extent.

By practising sense restraint and discerning the arising thoughts without immediately acting upon them, one can gain insight into the implications of sensuality and why it is not beneficial. Through diligent contemplation and clarification, doubts can be endured and overcome, and a deeper understanding of the danger of sensuality can be realised.

It should be understood that simply hearing about the dangers of sensuality is not enough. One must make a sincere effort to investigate and reflect upon their own experiences with sensuality in order to truly comprehend its harmful nature. Only then will the Buddha's similes regarding sensuality in the Suttas become clear and meaningful.

So, a genuine effort and personal investigation are necessary to truly comprehend and avoid the danger of sensuality. Mere provision of information without personal reflection and effort will not lead to understanding and seeing of the danger.

**Q: This is the simile of the deer herd that you often refer to:**

> Bhikkhus, a deer-trapper does not lay down bait for a deer herd intending thus: 'May the deer herd enjoy this bait that I have laid down and so be long-lived and handsome and endure for a long time.' A deer-trapper lays down bait for a deer herd intending thus: 'The deer herd will eat food unwarily by going right in amongst the bait that I have laid down; by so doing they will become intoxicated; when they are intoxicated, they will fall into negligence; when they are negligent, I can do with them as I like on account of this bait.- Mn25

Nm: It cannot be denied that there is a pleasant quality to indulging in the bait. However, it's a trap. If one truly comprehends this danger, the superficial allure of the bait will lose its power to arouse desire.

**Q: The bait is not intended for our well-being. The traps are not set for our benefit.**

Nm: As previously mentioned, it can be difficult to recognize the potential danger within sensuality when it presents itself in a beautiful and enticing manner. Our automatic response is to view it as friendly, non-threatening, and harmless. However, it's essential to challenge this perception and ask ourselves why we view it as such. What is the basis for our belief that pleasure of the senses is "natural" and harmless? Have we ever truly questioned it, or is it simply an assumption we've made without consideration?

If you fail to see sensuality as a problem, then no matter how much you study the Buddha's teachings, it will not make a difference. Sensuality is a problem because you are under its control. If you ignore this fact, you are like a prey caught in a trap, being dragged around by the hunter while pretending to be going where you want to go. Meanwhile, the hunter is there in your face, amused by your ignorance of the situation.

Sensuality, if it were wholesome, would not pressure you. It would not require the loss of self-awareness, or induce lust in your mind. Sensuality is deceptive and not what it appears to be. This is why the Buddha often compared it to a trap.

**Q:**

> "Now the deer of the first herd ate food unwarily by going right in amongst the bait that the deer-trapper had laid down; by so doing they became intoxicated; when they were intoxicated, they fell into negligence; when they were negligent, the deer-trapper did with them as he liked on account of that bait. That is how the deer of the first herd failed to get free from the deer trapper's power and control."

Nm: They act impulsively and indulge in their desires, without any consideration for the consequences or impact on themselves or others. This is common behaviour.

**Q:**

> "Now the deer of a second herd reckoned thus: 'The deer of that first herd, by acting as they did without precaution, failed to get free from the deer-trapper's power and control. Suppose we altogether shun that bait food; shunning that fearful enjoyment, let us go out into the forest wilds and live there.' And they did so. But in the last month of the hot season when the grass and the water were used up, their bodies were reduced to extreme emaciation; with that they lost their strength and energy; when they had lost their strength and energy, they returned to that same bait that the deer-trapper had laid down. They ate food unwarily by going right in amongst it. By doing so they became intoxicated; when they were intoxicated they fell into negligence; when they were negligent, the deer-trapper did with them as he liked on account of that bait. And that is how the deer of the second herd also failed to get free from the deer-trapper's power and control."

Nm: This second type of individuals, even without the guidance of the Buddha's teaching, can still experience the dissatisfaction and suffering caused by sensual desires and have enough intelligence to recognize it. One doesn't need to be a Buddhist to understand that these desires are temporary, can only be appeased but never satisfied and they control one's life. Many people realise this and question the purpose of pursuing these desires. Some of them choose to shun the bait, i.e. avoid engaging with anything pleasing to the senses, such as beautiful sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. However, they fail to understand the root of the problem – the attachment and craving in their minds – and mistake the objects of pleasure as the source of the problem. Thus, they become ascetics who deny any object that *could* be pleasing to the senses. They think that by doing so, they can escape the suffering caused by their own desires.

However, the problem with this approach is that pleasure or displeasure is not determined by the objects themselves, but by one's state of mind. Even if one lives on top of a mountain, the mind can still crave for pleasure and find it in things that were previously unpleasant. Therefore, one cannot sustain the practice of not engaging with sense objects forever. Sooner or later, one will encounter something pleasing, and if one hasn't understood the root of desire, one will be trapped by that.

This is similar to the second deer herd, which avoids the bait but eventually returns to it when food becomes scarce in the mountains. When they encounter the bait again, they get trapped because they haven't developed the wisdom to recognize where the *actual* trap is. They only know how to run away from the bait, but

not how to avoid discerning it from the trap.

Doubling down on asceticism or creating elaborate ways to avoid temptation, as the Jains did, will not solve the issue; as the root of sensuality is not in the objects themselves, but rather in one's craving. The Buddha himself tried extreme asceticism to the point of refusing to breathe or eat, but it did not free him from sensuality. He realized that pain, and self-torture, were not the ways to enlightenment.

Therefore, one should certainly exercise restraint and virtuous behaviour; but then when thoughts of sensuality arise, it is important to realise that not only should one not give into them, but neither should one simply try to get rid of them. This is akin to avoiding thinking about a trap without understanding how one is trapped. It is through enduring these thoughts and understanding the pressure that drives them that one can truly see its actual nature and overcome sensuality. The Buddha emphasised that sensuality is not rooted in the beautiful objects of the world, but rather in the desire and lust that surrounds them. An Arahant or Tathagata who has removed desire and lust from their thoughts can still perceive the beautiful objects without being driven by lust.

**Q:**

> "Now the deer of a third herd reckoned thus: 'The deer of that first herd, by acting as they did without precaution, failed to get free from the deer-trapper's power and control. The deer of that second herd, by reckoning how the deer of the first herd had failed and by planning and acting as they did with the precaution of going to live in the forest wilds, also failed to get free from the deer-trapper's power and control. Suppose we make our dwelling place within range of the deer-trapper's bait. Then, having done so, we shall eat food not unwarily and without going right in amongst the bait that the deer-trapper has laid down; by doing so we shall not become intoxicated; when we are not intoxicated, we shall not fall into negligence; when we are not negligent, the deer-trapper shall not do with us as he likes on account of that bait.' And they did so."But then the deer-trapper and his following considered thus: 'These deer of this third herd are as cunning and crafty as wizards and sorcerers. They eat the bait laid down without our knowing how they come and go. Suppose we have the bait that is laid down completely surrounded all round over a wide area with wicker hurdles; then perhaps we might see the third deer herd's dwelling place, where they go to hide.' They did so, and they saw the third herd's dwelling place, where they went to hide. And that is how the deer of the third herd also failed to get free from the deer-trapper's power and control."

Nm: This third deer herd is just like contemplatives who have renounced indulgence in external sense objects and extreme ascetic practices but have not abandoned their internal thirst for pleasure: they act under the pressure of their views in which they find pleasure. Although they may physically restrain themselves from indulging in sensual pleasures, they still mentally entertain the same value of pleasing objects and thirst for them. They may plan how to avoid displeasing sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches, build their own little palace, and avoid experiencing any hardship or elements. All of these thoughts and actions show that they are still concerned about catering to their senses for pleasure. Therefore, Mara, the trapper, may still catch them because they left all the footprints around the bait.

The Buddha compares this to holding views or opinions that one feels blindly justified about. Views can be anything from how monks should wear their robes to what should be done or how one should behave. It is not a choice to hold views, but it is a choice *what* views to hold and how to hold them. If one feels ill will or irritation when someone disagrees with their views, they are still holding onto views wrongly, even if they are based on Dhamma.

A person holds the views "wrongly" through an emotional state that underlies them. If one holds any view and feels emotionally disturbed when someone challenges it, they are wrong to that extent. Even if the view is accurate in and of itself. This means they have not removed the passion internally and are not free from sensuality.

The problem lies in whether one is emotionally attached to one's opinion or not. So, instead of trying to rid oneself of views, one should learn not to be moved by them. This way, one can objectively assess whether their views are right or wrong without feeling existentially threatened by opposing opinions. It is crucial

to abandon wrong views and be fearless in exploring and pushing in the very direction that one has been afraid of. If one is upset by worldly views, how much more emotional distress will they feel when they start undermining their very personal existential views?

Any emotional attachment to a view, whether it is right or wrong, is unjustifiable. If one finds oneself getting upset due to someone else's opinions or remarks, *that* makes them wrong. It does not matter if the other person is foolish; it is irrelevant from a standpoint of the Dhamma practice. Emotional involvement with any opinion or standpoint is a sign of being wrong.

By not being emotionally invested in our views and standpoints, we can avoid falling into the trap and thus become the fourth type of herd. The Buddha had views and opinions on many things, but he did not have passion underlying any of them. This is what we can strive for as well – to have views and opinions but not be moved by them emotionally.

**Q:**

> "Now the deer of a fourth herd reckoned thus: 'The deer of that first herd, by acting as they did without precaution, failed to get free from the deer-trapper's power and control. The deer of that second herd, by reckoning how the deer of the first herd had failed and by planning and acting as they did with the precaution of going to live in the forest wilds, also failed to get free from the deer-trapper's power and control. And the deer of that third herd, by reckoning how the deer of the first herd and also the deer of the second herd had failed, and by planning and acting as they did with the precaution of making their dwelling place within range of the deer-trapper's bait, also failed to get free from the deer-trapper's power and control. Suppose we make our dwelling place where the deer-trapper and his following cannot go. Then, having done so, we shall eat food not unwarily and without going right in amongst the bait that the deer-trapper has laid down; by doing so we shall not become intoxicated; when we are not intoxicated, we shall not fall into negligence; when we are not negligent, the deer-trapper shall not do with us as he likes on account of that bait.' And they did so."But then the deer-trapper and his following considered thus: 'These deer of this fourth herd are as cunning and crafty as wizards and sorcerers. They eat the bait laid down without our knowing how they come and go. Suppose we have the bait that is laid down completely surrounded all round over a wide area with wicker hurdles; then perhaps we might see the fourth deer herd's dwelling place, where they go to hide.' They did so, but they did not see the fourth deer herd's dwelling place, where they went to hide. Then the deer-hunter and his following considered thus: 'If we scare the fourth deer herd, being scared they will alert others, and so the deer herds will all desert this bait that we have laid down. Suppose we treat the fourth deer herd with indifference.' They did so. And that was how the deer of the fourth deer herd got free from the deer-trapper's power and control."

Nm: Individuals who are like the fourth type of deer herd do not accept any external justification for their standpoints, which allows them to become both externally and internally calmed. They do not act out of craving and instead develop *jhana*, which is a place where Mara cannot find them.

## Peripheral Awareness

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Mindfulness done correctly is when the mind is **anchored** in something. That something must be a thing that is not directly attended to, but instead, has to be a **reference point** to the attended thing (hence we call it "anchor"). If a thing is not directly attended to but there, we call that thing to be a "background". It's a background to a thing we attend (which makes that thing a "foreground"). This is the basic principle of mindfulness, on which we can expand here below.

One begins developing this practice of awareness by being mindful of the experience as a **whole**. For example, one is mindful of 'being-seated-on-a-chair-reading-a-Dhamma-essay'. That is one's **situation** at that very time. That is one's experience as a "whole". This is always the necessary starting point. What is very important is to prevent the tendency to become absorbed in one particular thing. (Feeling, sensations or

perception, and similar). Instead, one has to broaden the mindfulness and become aware of the **generality** of one's current situation, without losing the sight of the particular either.[1]

Of course, the attempts of discerning the background of one's current experience will not be perfect in the beginning. One will more often than not fall into a mistake of over-attending one's experience as a whole. This is a mistake of making that background into an **object** of one's attention, defining it, clarifying it, trying to keep it in front. These are all ways of making it a **foreground,** which means that then something else will be in place of the background.

The natural tendency is to ask "**What** is then the background?". This is however a wrong question. And it's wrong because we are not concerned with the **content** of the background (or foreground for that matter), which would be the answer to "what?". Instead our concern should be with **nature** of it. So one needs to restrain the tendency to clarify **what** is that "background", and learn how to start discerning the **domain** of it. The domain of the "**periphery**", its nature, in regard to **what** is presently **enduring** here.

Thus, something one attends to directly is what a foreground is at the time. It can be anything that is the current object of one's attention. That thing has manifested, and it is enduring as such. That's the basic structural property of one's experience, there is no problem with this. However, if one wants to develop mindfulness, a step further is necessary. That step is developing the peripheral "vision" in regard to that very same foreground object, but **without** making that peripheral vision the new object by **directly** attending to it. The Buddha referred to this as "**yoniso manasikara**", which is often translated as "proper attention". **Yoniso manasikara** is the correct way of attending to the peripheral. **Manasikara** means "attention". **Yoni** means "womb". So when a thing is present in the front, in the foreground, its peripheral background is that very "womb" the thing has "came from", so to speak. **Yoniso manasikara** is womb-attention, or less literally: a peripheral attention.[2]

Thus, the point is to learn **how** to attend. Not so much "what". It's about discerning the habit of "over-attending" and learning how to not resort to it. This habit manifests through either indulging or resisting the object of one's attention. Either way, one is fully concerned with it. This is why one must stop trying to "observe" one's experience as an object of one's attention and instead, acknowledge it and let it **endure** on its own. (Let it persist or change-while-remaining-the-same-thing). Once the arisen experience of one's attention is allowed to **be**, then gradually and **indirectly**, discerning of the peripheral **domain** can manifest.

The most practical way of practising this is through mindfulness of body postures. That's why these things are often called "foundations" of mindfulness, or "anchors" or "reference points". It's because they are **always** rooted in the **background.** (E.g. foundations are **under;** an anchor is at the **bottom**; the reference point is at the **distance.** Under, bottom, away… it means 'not-here-directly-in-front-of-me'). So for example: while I'm seated, I'm reading an article, actively scrolling through the pages, paying attention to what's being said in it. Things I'm "doing", like reading, writing, talking, etc. are things I'm attending to (foreground). And I'm attending to them all **while** I'm **seated**. That's the reference point that is enough for proper mindfulness. That is what's the background here. Yet, if I switch my attention and start attending to the fact that I'm sitting on the chair, then the body posture of "sitting" ceases to be the background in my experience. Why? Because I've broken the relationship of "referencing". There is no more "**while**", since I forgot about the reading, and became concerned with sitting. When this happens, one can either go back to the original foreground, or discern the newly present background in regard to the attended experience of sitting. The new background will have to be something even more **general** than "sitting posture". And the more general thing in that case is nothing other than awareness of the "body there".[3]

Body postures are more general than attending to a particular action or perception. But having a "body **there**" is even more general than the postures. Because to be walking, sitting, standing or lying down, one

[1] This is why the correct practice of mindfulness results in higher establishments of mind (*samadhi*). For example, this is where mind surmounts the fundamental "generality" of form, by the way of surmounting the generality of earth, water, fire and air. Also, there is a reason that the order of elements always stays the same. They are have a particular structural order of their generality. And one can discern them in that order only.

[2] That's also why this type of attention is said by the Buddha to be one of the necessary pre-requisites for the arising of the Right view.

[3] "…or mindfulness that"there is body" is simply established in him to the extent necessary for the final knowledge." – MN 10, *Satipatthana Sutta*.

needs to have a **body** in the first place. That's why one can also use the knowledge of "there is body", as the peripheral anchor for one's daily actions and experiences. The presence of one's living body is a fundamental requirement for **any** action. We can go even higher (even more general), as we mentioned earlier, and develop awareness of the phenomenon of Earth, Water, Fire or Air. Or even further, in the practice of more refined **kasinas,** as described in the **Suttas**. The point is that the principle remains the same.

We need to stress that this is something that requires **development**. It's not something that can be just "figured out", or read once and made sense of. It requires a diligent **repetition** of "stepping back" when over-attending one's experience as a whole. And then "stepping in" when ignoring it (under-attending it, forgetting about the background). So, it takes time and effort in order for it to be correctly **discerned** and **recognized**.

The problem with common practice of meditation is that people are encouraged to get "absorbed" into the particular "meditation object". The practice becomes a form of focusing on the foreground at the expense of everything else. And not just that, people end up focusing on the objects twice as hard. This is because their view of meditation is to look and **perceive** the "momentary" foreground (the whole idea of "observing **'sensations'") .** Then **within** that they try to perceive even **more particular** things. So it's not just the **domain** of the foreground, but the content proliferates further too. In cases like this, the 'background', as a foundation of mindfulness that needs to be understood, is even further obscured.

The 'reference point' means being aware of something, without having to **actively** think about it. That's the basic principle of mindfulness. This should **always** be the basis for **samadhi** (according to the **Suttas**).[4] That is why, if mindfulness and awareness is practised correctly, it will result in **knowledge** of the nature of things. The very definition of knowledge is knowing something without having to actively think about it. The knowledge reappears when it is attended to. One knows what one knows. This is the important point because this type of mindfulness of the background that's simultaneous with the presently arisen phenomenon[5], results in the establishment of mind (**samadhi**) that transcends **sensuality** and **ill will.** The whole **domain** (scope) of unwholesome.[6] And that's why that **samadhi** further results in complete knowledge of liberation.

The catch is in persistent effort of repetition of **learning** how to **attend** to things **peripherally,** without having to "directly" look at them. For a mind affected with **avijja**, the "direct look", the "**ayoniso manasikara**" always involves **appropriation** and the **Self-view**. And "learning to attend" things peripherally can be done on many different "bases" or "domains" that are structurally present as the background of our attended experience. These domains are the domain of feelings, thoughts, and even one's intentions (bodily, verbal and mental).

For example, being aware of the **general feeling** present, without trying to **perceive** it as "sensation" (i.e. "in" the body), is another way of establishing the proper mindfulness.

Or, something we often talk about, taking up of personal **responsibility**. If one takes it up, then no matter what the engagement with the particular task is, the background of it (the "womb" of that engagement) is one's own **choice** to engage with it in the first place. Taking up responsibility, means becoming aware of the "background" choices one makes throughout one's life.[7]

Furthermore, taking up responsibility for what one has chosen, a person gets to maintain that mindfulness through the very particular actions one is doing on account of it. And that mindfulness of responsibility is not something they would have to perpetually think about. No, that mindfulness is being **felt** instead.

[4]"Unification of mind, friend Visakha, is samadhi. The four foundations of mindfulness are the basis of samadhi. The four right kind of striving are the equipment of samadhi. The repetition, the development and cultivation of those same states is what development of samadhi is." – MN 44, *Culavedalla Sutta*.

[5]Experience as a whole, the 'foreground-without-focusing-on-particular-object-witin-it'.

[6]Sensuality is *always* concerned with the particular content of the experience. Particular *sight, sound, smell, taste, touch*. Thus, mindfulness of the peripheral domain to the particular foreground, can result in overcoming it.

[7]Hence the fully developed knowledge that came from the Right View, results in freeing an individual from his actions (*kamma*). Full understanding of the nature of the "choice" as "peripheral", removes the gratuitous *assumption (upadana)* of necessity of the "Chooser" i.e. the Self. Understanding the choice or intentional intention (*cetana*) frees oneself from choosing (i.e. acting).

(That's why the initial awareness of **any** form of responsibility is always **unpleasant** and concerning).

The choice behind one's actions is a general **unity**, a **context** of one's acts, that is present in each of those acts individually. Present as a peripheral background. It is because of this that **sila** or **virtue** is a necessary prerequisite for understanding. When one's actions are based on **distortions** of priority (particular sensuality **over** general nature of choice regarding it, for example), one cannot see a clear responsible background while engaged in such pursuits. No perspective, so to speak. So, first actions that maintain absorptions with particularity must be divorced from the unwholesome domain. Then they must be further restrained, by avoiding the distracting of oneself. By undoing wrong way of attending to things. By not cultivating improper attention. Only then can one begin to discern **the signs** of the peripheral, characteristics of the background hereby discussed. Only then one will be able to "grasp the sign of one's mind" or **cittanimitta.** A necessary requirement for the arising of the Right view.

by

Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

## The Necessity of Celibacy

***(download as PDF)***

Practice of celibacy is always beneficial. Even for a lay person, who is not necessarily Buddhist or familiar with the Dhamma. The obvious reason for its benefits is the inevitable increase of the mental strength that comes with the restraint. This restraint is *intentional* and aims at a very powerful desire that otherwise shapes and controls one's whole life. Sensuality / sexuality is something that heavily contributes towards defining one's actions and choices. It is something that has at least some influence in virtually all of them.

Thus, adopting a practice of restraint of the sensual desire, a person will be going against that grain of the natural sexual pull of one's own body. Through willingly imposing this restraint, the mind will be pressured to grow – in terms of strength and in terms of enduring of itself. (As the case with any strength development is. Gradually increasing resistance, increases the capacity to hold the very same.)

Sometimes people think that not having sexual intercourse is all that being celibate means. That doesn't constitute the celibacy we are talking about here. The difference is to not be celibate *only* because the current circumstances are presenting no options, but to actually be celibate as a result of *determination* and *practice of restraint.* (And then one might decide to live in the circumstance that present no options, and that's fine.) It's important to not misunderstand this. We are not saying that one somehow needs to be *tempting* oneself with sensuality. "Flirting" with it, so to speak, to keep reinforcing the practice of saying "no" to it. That's ridiculous. And completely misguided and countering the right efforts. Flirting with sensuality can only be done out of *sensuality.* (As the Buddha said, it's not possible to have sensual perception without the mind being bound by sensuality.) So, tempting oneself with sensuality, it's already a form of engaging *with* sensuality. As such, it goes against the practice of the celibate determinations.

> "Firstly, a man who claims to be perfectly celibate does not mutually engage in sex with a woman. However, they consent to being anointed, massaged, bathed, and rubbed by a woman. They enjoy it and like it and find it satisfying. This is a corruption, flaw, blemish, or taint in celibacy. This is called one who lives the celibate life impurely, tied to the fetter of sex. They're not freed from rebirth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. They're not freed from suffering, I say.
>
> Furthermore, a man who claims to be perfectly celibate does not mutually engage in sex with a woman. Nor do they consent to massage and bathing. However, they laugh and play and have fun with women.
>
> they gaze into a woman's eyes;
>
> they listen through a wall or rampart to the sound of women laughing or chatting or singing or crying.

> they recall when they used to laugh, chat, and have fun with women;
>
> they see a householder or their child amusing themselves, supplied and provided with the five kinds of sensual pleasures;
>
> They don't see a householder or their child amusing themselves, supplied and provided with the five kinds of sensual pleasures. However, they live the celibate life wishing to be reborn in one of the orders of gods. They think: 'By this precept or observance or mortification or spiritual life, may I become one of the gods!' They enjoy it and like it and find it satisfying. This is a corruption, flaw, blemish, or taint in celibacy. This is called one who lives the celibate life impurely, tied to the fetter of sex. They're not free from rebirth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. They're not free from suffering, I say.
>
> As long as I saw that these seven sexual fetters—or even one of them—had not been given up in me, I didn't announce my supreme perfect awakening in this world with its gods, Maras and Brahmas, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its gods and humans.
>
> But when I saw that these seven sexual fetters—every one of them—had been given up in me, I announced my supreme perfect awakening in this world with its gods, Maras and Brahmas, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its gods and humans. Knowledge and vision arose in me: 'My freedom is unshakable; this is my last rebirth; now there are no more future lives.' "
> – Anguttara Nikaya, 7.50

So, it's this determination, the decision to not engage with sensuality ever again that makes all the difference. Just like when a person is trying to give up smoking for example. It will be much harder to do so if you bring yourself up to decide to *never* smoke again, as opposed to deciding it to quit it half-heartedly for a month or so. The former would exert much more pressure on an individual and even someone who was not a heavy, but a casual, smoker would feel the whole weight of it. And this is even more true of celibacy. And it is necessary to determine it in such a decisive manner.

Only then the mind will be pushed towards development (provided it doesn't break) of strength on that corresponding level. Anything short of it, the mind will just tread water until the pressure of sexuality builds up, and then inevitably give in. Determining it decisively, however, means that person's entire life will have to be affected by the profound shift in significance of ordinary things in day to day life. This is pretty much the main reason why most of the people would be afraid of doing it.

As hard as it might seem, it is still very much possible to succeed with a persistent effort over a period of time. If one modifies one's environment to support the restraint and to not add more to the already existing pressure, the mind can eventually become dry of the inherent "wetness" of the desires. Then everything in person's life that was depending on the acts of sensuality and non-restraint, will also "dry out". A person would be free from it. This refers to the inherent worries of protecting what one has acquired, pains of craving towards what one doesn't have yet, obstacles of one's worldly ambitions, and similar. All these things will have no significance any more. They will not be able to cause one to suffer on account of them.

It is also important to mention that the *sooner* one starts this practice the better. It is not uncommon for people to think that they have time to get older and pursue sexual and sensual desires. And that then afterwards, they can practice restraint and free themselves from desires. Unfortunately, it's quite the opposite: the longer one waits the harder it will be to *discern* sensuality and do something about it. With old age, sexuality goes "underground" so to speak. The time comes when the body loses its vigour and the sexuality won't manifest any more in a form of obvious physical behaviour and thirst. This can mislead a person to believe that they are free from it. What actually happened was that sexuality has now descended from something that was discernible (bodily actions and thoughts of such) to something that's virtually invisible. A subtle *background* that becomes a ubiquitous motivation for all sorts of habits, acts and even psychological needs. They wouldn't carry the sensual flavour to them anymore. A flavour that used to be very clear on the surface of them at all. If the mind hasn't made the effort, while the aim of the effort was obvious, it won't be able to do it now. Of course, it is still possible in theory at least. But, when the strength and determination fade with the body, having been left undeveloped for so long, it is very unlikely that that will change. (The Suttas,

though, do list few exceptions of very old people reaching arahantship. But those were rare, which is why they were so clearly remembered.)

Thus, the sooner the better. That's also why many people in time of the Buddha were inspired to see young monks and nuns in *prime* of their life. Meaning: they were at the time of their lives when sensuality was still available and easy to get. They have not just given it up, but ended up *enjoying* the practise of restraint and understanding the Dhamma.

> "Then that devata said to the Venerable Samiddhi:"You have gone forth while young, bhikkhu, a lad with black hair, endowed with the blessing of youth and strength, in the prime of life, without having dallied with sensual pleasures. Enjoy human sensual pleasures, bhikkhu; do not abandon what is directly visible in order to pursue what takes time."
>
> "I have not abandoned what is directly visible, friend, in order to pursue what takes time. I have abandoned what takes time in order to pursue what is directly visible. For the Blessed One, friend, has stated that sensual pleasures are time-consuming, full of suffering, full of despair, and the danger in them is still greater, while this Dhamma is directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise." — SN 1.20

We must stress here that practice of sense restraint would be beneficial even to those who have no interest in practising the Dhamma – fully or partially. Because if the mind manages to become stronger than the sensual pull, and learns how to go beyond sensual cravings, it will to a great degree go beyond the burdens that come with the sensuality. Burdens that are otherwise unavoidable and bring much worry and suffering. Going beyond sensuality will also lessen the grip of one's own Ego and all the conceit underlying it would be reduced. The anxieties, lack of satisfaction, guilt over things done in the past – all of that would disappear or be significantly removed. Of course, we can only imagine what greater freedom can be gained, if on top of the steadfast restraint, one also practices the Dhamma instructions towards uprooting even the subtle conceit and cravings.

The entire life of a person most often revolves around following desires. Trying to get what one wants is the most fundamental habit of a human mind. This is quite normal, but the problem is in that *what* people want is almost always rooted in sensuality. One's desires are most often aimed at the pursuit of the pleasures gained through physical senses. Pleasant sights, sounds, tastes, smells and touches. Subtle or coarse. If a man begins to learn how to go against this *sensual "grain"* that exhorts pressure on him, that will already mean a beginning of strength. Of course, mere resistance to such sensual cravings will not be able to uproot the sensuality in itself. For that, *understanding* of the nature of that sensuality will be necessary. But this is only possible on the *basis* of the sense restraint. For example, if a person has been adhering to the practice of restraint and abstaining from *intentionally* giving in to sense desires, that person will be able to see the gratuitous nature of the sensual desire in a form of one's own thoughts. It is something that has arisen completely uninvited, yet pressures one to act upon it as if it is truly owned by him. Sticking to this kind of reflection can reveal that even things that one does want and desire, are rooted and arisen as something that is fundamentally outside of one's control. One's responsibility lies not in preventing those thoughts from arising, but in choosing to *delight* and *entertain* them. Or not, as the Buddha would tell. In brief: being able to see the uncontrollable (gratuitous) nature of one's own desires, one can overcome the pressure that they exhort on him.

The main reason why most people wouldn't even consider the practice of celibacy is because it's simply too difficult. Because of that it is also unlikely that a man would choose to do it, outside of some sort of philosophical belief or a religious practice. There just wouldn't be enough motivation.

To reiterate: freedom from sensuality starts by giving it up first. Saying "no" to it. That is not optional. This initial effort can then enable a person to allow the nature of desire to *manifest* and *arise*. As opposed to someone who tries to prevent this, or rather cover it up. This cover up is due to instantaneous giving in to the pressure of desire (if not physically, at least mentally). Or it is due to trying to prevent it and deny it. (The former and the latter correspond to sensual indulgence and self-mortification respectively.)

Giving in to the pressure, distracts one from seeing what is it that pressures him in the first place. Denying it, does the same. If one *learns* how to endure it through restraint, then it can become clear that there is

no pressure of sensuality *without* one's body. A person at a face value regards one's own body as basis for pleasure. It's seen to be something "free" and "effortless". Something that belongs to "me". That in itself is a sufficient reason for giving in to it. Hence, it's not incidental that the Buddha often compared sensuality to a "bait".

If one contemplates the necessity of the living healthy body for *any* sensual engagements (fleeting or otherwise), it can be discerned that even the pleasures that one can gain from it *belong* to the actual *sense organs*. As in: pleasures are inseparable and inconceivable without them. Thus, if one wants to overcome the entire domain of sensuality, one can do so by overcoming the *ownership* of the sense organs (or the *body* as a whole). And extinguishing of the ownership, i.e. the necessary condition of sensuality, is done by understanding that it was impossible to own the body in the first place. If that were not so, then one's desires would *already* be all satisfied (i.e. there would be no desires to begin with). Alternatively, one can contemplate that if one were the true master and owner of one's own body, that body would not be a *subject* to illness, aging and death. It would not be *liable* to accidents, elements, circumstances, etc. This kind of understanding can only be properly developed on the basis of restraint and celibacy. And once it is developed, then the restraint will become a normal mode of behaviour. It will not be a way of "resistance" to the sensual pull any more, because there will be no more senses that can pull one. Senses and their respective desires are a problem only when they are "mine".

by Ajhan Nyanamoli Thero

## Intentions behind one's actions

The Right meditation is inseparable from the Right view. That means that even if a person doesn't have the Right view, their meditation should be concerned about getting it. To put it simply – it comes down to developing the self-transparency (or self-honesty) concerning skilful as skilful (*kusala*) and unskilful as unskilful (*akusala*). The Buddha defined the Right view in those very terms – knowing "good as good", and "bad as bad". The person with the Right view knows for oneself, beyond any doubt, *kusala* as *kusala* and *akusala* as *akusala*. By seeing it – he recognizes it. He doesn't need to hold or adopt any other external criteria. The clarity of his vision pertains to here and now, internally. Thus, for someone who hasn't achieved that yet, that's where the meditation should start. Obtaining of the Right criteria and then meditating through it. Keeping it "composed" is the definition of the Right *samadhi*.

The problem is that this kind of instruction is very non-specific. People today usually need something more proliferated and palpable. They require meditation "methods". An average man today wants a "recipe", a prescription of "steps". He needs to know what *exactly* he should *do*, that would then automatically result in his liberation. Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. If we look at the Suttas, whenever the Buddha was talking about meditation it was to bring the fulfilment of knowledge and wisdom. Yet, if a person has none of the latter to begin with, then the fulfilment cannot arise nor be fabricated mechanically. Very often the Buddha's reply on how to meditate would be in instructing people in recognizing and avoiding the unskilful, and cultivating (*bhavana*) of the skilful. Discerning the nature of *kusala* and *akusala* has the potential of taking the mind above both. Freeing it from action (*kamma*) and it's results (*vipaka*), since they are bound to the domain of skilful and unskilful. And that's exactly why performing (*doing* or *acting*) of the specific steps, cannot take one *beyond* the nature of *kamma.* Understanding it however, might.

Furthermore, methods and techniques usually don't amount to more than management of the problem of suffering. Management of something cannot actually uproot that very thing. So, instead of that, a person will be better of in trying to discern what kind of attitude towards meditation can be sustained throughout the day. An attitude that wouldn't need any particular favorable environment or special conditions to be applied in. Regardless of whether one is sitting in a full lotus posture, or just walking down the street. One needs to find that kind of *composure* that one can maintain in both circumstances. The way to do this is if the composure is established upon the *general mindfulness.* Not the particular observation and adherence to the prescribed steps of a "meditation" technique, that results in one being *absorbed in it.* Absorption is the opposite of general mindfulness.

Every *jhana* for example is fully founded upon the basis of the unshakeable mindfulness as number of Suttas

often mention. So, even if a person wants to do his meditation in a "formal" manner, such as sit for an hour few times a day, that is fine. As long as it is not done for the purpose of developing some sort of "experience of absoption" out of it. Like trying to watch one's breath hoping for some novelty energy release. The point of meditation is to remain *present* as much as possible. Present or mindful of *whatever* is ***already there*** (feelings, perceptions, intentions). Not interfere with it, or deny it, or try to replace it. Just discerning the enduring presence of the arisen experience. Emotionally, perceptually and intentionally. That kind of composure can then be "spread out" over one's entire day, even when a person is not sitting down to meditate.

And this should not be too hard to grasp (though that doesn't mean it will be easy to accept). The whole point of the practice of Dhamma and meditation is nothing other than understanding of the nature of things. The understanding that arises on account of mindful discerning of whatever is *arisen* and *enduring* in our experience. And it's that understanding of the unskilful that frees the mind from it. If a person wants to be truly free once and for all, the only way to do so is through the knowledge and mindfulness.

Thus, if one wants to practice in a manner that pertains to this final goal of freedom, he needs to become very mindful and honest about intentionality behind any actions. Simple actions, more complex ones, careless or important, big or small – actions of any kind done by body, speech or mind. One will need to attend to them mindfully until the motivation and intentions behind is fully seen. That is because it is the intention that defines wholesome action as wholesome and unwholesome as unwholesome. The "reason" for one's action so to speak. That's where skilfulness of an action is rooted at. That's also the *real* "reason", the one deep inside that one might not be willing to admit to oneself. If a person is able to reach the full transparency of one's intentional actions and its roots, that person is a step closer in discerning what makes *kusala* as *kusala* and *akusala* as *akusala*. That person is a step closer to the beginning of the Right criteria or view.

So, if one needs to meditate, one needs to be concerned with one's actions and choices. (Which is also why *sila* or virtue comes before the Dhamma). In such manner any motivation for one's intentions behind doing this or that will reveal and not taken at its face value. Through this persistent self-questioning one can also see whether an action that is about to be, is rooted in an unskilful motive. Like sensuality, ill will, vanity or distraction for example. Furthermore, one would need to abandon only *that*. The unwholesome. One doesn't need to cancel the entire arisen experience and behaviour. That would be a form of overdoing it, and not using mindfulness as a criteria of discernment. "Is what I am about to do rooted in greed? Lust? How about ill-will and annoyance or anger?" Or "am I acting out of a desire for distraction and forgetfulness? Am I willingly giving in to acts and desires that would delude me further and mask the unskilful basis of those very actions?" Such questioning about the personal and inner dimension of one's daily experiences and actions will *have to* result in being mindful. This is a definition of (proper) *vipassana* or investigation, since that's exactly what's being done. Self investigating the motivation behind any actions. And it is obvious to see how this kind of attitude and mindful practice would result in discerning "good as good, bad as bad". How it would not be dependent on any external authority or belief. Instead be a direct, visible, universal criteria seen personally for oneself.

It's important to note it is not necessary that one becomes neurotic or obsessed (though it might happen) about it. Always having to *actually* ask oneself "what am I doing?" before every action. What's important is the *attitude* of such *questioning*. The "answer" is already implied within it. One already *knows* why one is acting. Whether one is aware of it or not, that's a different matter. Of course, until that attitude is developed and refined, a person will have to endure possible loss of (superficial) confidence and choice paralysis. That's because the implications of one's smallest actions are becoming more revealed. A person starts to feel responsible even for things that are not in his control.

So through this kind of "revealing" of the roots of one's actions, one is simultaneously becoming less and less able to ignore one's true intentions. One will not be able to turn a blind eye towards acting good while the real motivation underneath it isn't necessarily so. That's why this attitude is "self-transparent". Whatever is on the surface, one simultaneously sees beneath it *as well*.

Consequently, one will be able to also see if something is genuinely not rooted in greed, aversion or delusion.

In such case even if the whole world comes to tell him that that's still "bad", his discernment would remain unshaken. As mentioned above, that's because good and bad are defined by the intention behind them. Not by the common tradition, views and opinions, duty and culture, but by whether greed, aversion and delusion underlies them.

It should be clear by now that the self-honesty or transparency is not an optional thing (or just one of different ways leading to the same goal). It's an absolute pre-requisite for any chance of getting the Right view and knowing how to practice the Dhamma. If a person still has difficulties in abandoning own dependence upon a particular "method" of practice, they can still take up this practice of self-questioning all the time, as a "method". Although not ideal, it will still result in seeing through the motivation and emotional need for any methods in the first place. (Needing "something to do".) By seeing the subtle motivation under *any* action, one will automatically feel responsible for one's choices. No matter how "justified" those might seem externally. The weight on it is always on oneself, and that's something that one cannot ignore any further.

It is also then when the full weight of the Buddha's "beings are owners of one's actions" saying, is truly felt.

by Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

## Breathing Towards Death

Practising the mindfulness of breathing correctly, means practising the mindfulness of death correctly.

The Buddha has offered mindfulness of breathing as a replacement for the practice of mindfulness of death. That was because mindfulness of death pushed some monks over the edge, so to speak. It made them wish for ending of their life before being fully awakened. Yet, it is important to note that mindfulness of breath aims at the *same* result as mindfulness of death does. That result is dispassion towards the world and life (of sensuality) in general. The mindfulness of breathing was a direct response to the need for rapid dispassion of those committed to its practice. This of course doesn't mean that mindfulness of death was wrong, but it means that mindfulness of breath is simply less risky. It cannot be stressed enough though – they both aim at the same result.

Furthermore, this applies for any other "meditation" that we find in Suttas. They might sound very different, but their aim is the same: the establishment of mindfulness. Mindfulness to the extent necessary for the discernment of Dhamma. Thus, we can say that if someone's meditation is not bringing them closer to *understanding* of sensuality and experience of dispassion – that meditation is wrong.

The breath can end at any given moment, and we wouldn't be able to do anything about it. Random organ failure, heart attack, lung collapse, none of these things would be accessible to our will power, yet, our entire life (that same "will power") directly and simultaneously depends on it. For example, if something were to happen to the vital functions of our body, our life would end that very moment. Regardless of where our hopes and intentions were aiming at the time. This recognition can be very unpleasant for an average inauthentic man of the world and it could result in the experience of a tremendous fear and dread. It is the aim of the mindfulness of death to cut through the manifold layers of that inauthenticity. But, as the Buddha has himself seen, it can sometimes be too much to handle; if a person realizes one's own mortality too fast and is not prepared for it. Hence the mindfulness of breathing comes as a more gradual replacement. A replacement that still, very much, leads in the same direction of recognizing the inherent insecurity of one's own life. This insecurity manifests through realizing the impermanence of breath, *while* one mindfully breathes. So, the difference between mindfulness of breath and mindfulness of death is not in its "object", but in a *point of view.* (or where the mindfulness is anchored in).

In 'death meditation' the point of view is in one's *sense of Self*. This is more "personal" approach (which is why it is sharper, quicker, and thus *riskier*). In 'breath meditation' the point of view is placed on the *intentional act of breathing*. By doing so, one's sense of Self is not in the direct center of the experience. (as opposed to the thought "*I will* die", for example). Either way, one can realize that no matter how volitional an act (of breathing) might be, it is fundamentally rooted away from one's control. (Control that is the exemplification

of one's sense of Self.). This becomes clear when one recognizes that *while* breathing, the body (or the lungs, or heart, etc.) could stop working. They *could* fail. That whole dimension, where the failure would come from, would remain entirely "inaccessible" to one's intentions and will. No amount of one's volition would be able to "cross" that threshold of control that is determined by the present body that is simply "able to breath". (i.e. unobstructed airways, functioning lungs, beating heart, etc.). In simple terms: one's sense of control, intentions, will, sense of Self, are all bound up with presently arisen functioning body. And the *presence* of that body is not accessible to one's will. (If it were so, we wouldn't be susceptible to illness, aging and death.). Recognition of that lack of access to the fundamental aspects of one's own life, is the recognition of *impermanence*. Thus, in mindfulness of breathing, one exposes oneself to the sharp truth of *anicca*, but without winding oneself up through the anxious contemplation of death.

We can go as far as to say that one's life is *completely* rooted outside one's own sense of control. In other words, one's ability to exercise will and control, is something that one has no control over. For example: if something random, (an accident or, a disease,) were to simply block the air passages, no amount of intentional breathing would be able to help us. Yet, our whole life would depend on it.

Correctly discerning this, results in the *right* dispassion. And that means having no desire for either life or death.

The reason why this is very important to see is that many people use a mere pleasure that they derive from meditation as a criterion for their progress. But, pleasure is secondary, and is not something an unawakened being should use to judge things against. Pleasure is not the measure of success, it's the unshakeable composure of peace in the face of death, that is. Thus, one's meditation of breath should establish itself upon mindfulness of the impermanence as described above. It should not become something agreeable that one uses for not dealing with the world.

A dying man can only rely upon his wisdom, if he developed it. Wisdom is not dependent upon any phenomenon originated upon six senses. It is developed on the basis of the *discernment* of the same. That's why when one's senses start to wither and die, the knowledge of their nature remains unaffected. When there is no wisdom, there will be despair, in the face of death.

by Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

## Notes on Meditation

"1. Mindfulness of breathing, bhikkhus, developed and repeatedly practised, is of great fruit, of great benefit; mindfulness of breathing, bhikkhus, developed and repeatedly practised, perfects the four foundations of mindfulness; the four foundations of mindfulness, developed and repeatedly practised, perfect the seven enlightenment factors; the seven enlightenment factors, developed and repeatedly practised, perfect knowledge and freedom…

2. Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.

3. Breathing in long, he knows, 'I breathe in long'; or breathing out long, he knows, 'I breathe out long.'

4. Breathing in short, he knows, 'I breathe in short'; or breathing out short, he knows, 'I breathe out short.'

5. 'Experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe in,' he trains himself thus; 'experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe out,' he trains himself thus.

6. 'Calming the bodily determination, I shall breathe in,' he trains himself thus; 'calming the bodily determination, I shall breathe out,' he trains himself thus…"

*Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118.

1. The practice of *ānāpānasati* or mindfulness of breathing represents a phenomenological exercise in developing the principle of simultaneity (*akālikā dhamma*). This is accomplished by the sufficient establishing of *mindfulness* and *knowledge* of what one is supposed to do and discern.[8] It is an exercise because it requires one actively engaging in and being aware of the *act of breathing*, and it develops the principle of simultaneity because *while* one is actively breathing, one is aware of one's actions (body, feelings, and thoughts). These are two *different*, simultaneously present things: the physical or *bodily act* of breathing, and the mental *reflexive thoughts* of one doing that very act. One is not supposed to be favoured on account of the other; a person should not be *overdoing* the breathing (i.e. turning it into a forceful breathing exercise) nor should he be *underdoing it* (i.e. forgetting about the *act* of breathing that is being performed, and letting it happen unawares). In the same sense one should not *overthink* one's thinking (i.e. get lost in thought). The point is to mindfully breathe *while* remain fully aware of oneself-mindfully-breathing, or – to put it simply – to remain aware of the present phenomenon of "I am breathing."

2. Breathing is an intentional action, not a habit, and there is volition involved in every single breath a person takes. The reason why most people think breathing is an automated process is because they are almost never aware of it. Thus the intentional side of the breath remains obscured. [9]By being an act (*kamma*), it has potential, if understood as such, to reveal the nature of all acts (present, future and past), of everything one has ever intentionally done and planning to do. By being an intentional act, breathing shares the same universal nature as all good and evil actions in this world. The reason why breathing is such a suitable act for the practice of mindfulness [10] is because it is *an immediately neutral action*, there is no actual good or bad involved in it. Thus, although it shares the same nature as all these other more "kammically" (and consequentially) *engaging* acts, there are no future results involved that would pertain to oneself and others. The merit of an in-breath ceases with an out-breath.

3. As we see from the opening excerpt, by "training oneself thus…," a monk develops mindfulness of both *immediate* and *possible* action (*kamma*): "I breathe in/out (thus)…," and "(thus) I shall breathe in/out…." This kind of mindfulness when developed leaves nothing out, and one is simply, yet steadily, becoming more aware of the nature of action in general *while* that very action is actually present. Ultimately of course, this leads to the full transparency of that "I", in that experience of breathing as a whole, and its utterly redundant *nature* that is being gratuitously assumed. [11] This nature, if mindfulness pursued to the extent necessary,[12] can eventually be completely understood and the gratuitous "I" destroyed. This, however, should not be taken in a sense that the phenomenon of "I" would disappear like it was never there, but in a sense that that "I" will cease *to be* "me" and "mine". It will remain just standing there, hollow and dry.

4. The reason why it is recommended that one should *sit* when exercising mindfulness of breathing is because such a posture offers the least distractions to one's mind. When seated, one will not be engaging in any *other* action different from breathing (and passively sitting of course). So, the only thing that one is going to be *doing* is breathing. In this way it can be understood that sitting is the *most optimal* posture to have, so that one wouldn't be wasting any effort. Consequently, with the further development of the discernment of the simultaneously present phenomena, and with the strengthening of mindfulness, one can more freely assume other postures and not remain confined to sitting alone. Furthermore, even engaging in other acts, for example: "*while* breathing, I am sweeping the floor," will not be a distraction for one's mindfulness in any way. In this particular instance, one's mindfulness and discernment is *divided*, or shared by, *two* simultaneously present actions (sweeping and breathing), *while* one is also simultaneously *aware of that thing as a whole*. And this division can continue as far as the strength of one's mindfulness allows, though there is no particular benefit and reason in pushing it.

5. Sometimes people assume that in *ānāpānasati* one is mindful of the "body of breath," as opposed to just one's (experience of) body. [13] This rendering comes from the confusion and lack of phenomenological

[8]Which is why in order to correctly do any of the practices found in the Suttas, one needs the right view first.

[9]Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Clearing the Path, p. 195.

[10]As recommended in SN 54:9.

[11]Whether it is "I am breathing in," or "I shall breathe in," through mindful repetition the "I" begins to stand out, so to speak, and when paired with understanding, the more it "stands out," the less it is mine.

[12]Cf. MN 10.

[13]This should not be mistaken as "sensations". See below.

insight into the nature of (appearing) body. If one is to understand that whether it is the ordinary experience of one's body in everyday existence, or an unusual one resulting from the new practice of concentration, or even a strange sense of lightness of one's body on drugs, in phenomenological terms – body is *just there*. Thus, again, regardless of the *particular way* one's body presents itself, it is the phenomenon of body that is present, and that's what one should be concerned with. So, when practising mindfulness of breathing, one *actually* devotes direct attention to the 'act of breathing,' *that body* (or that strange-sense-of-body) that emerges as a phenomenon, *peripherally*, is *that which is the body*, in that experience right then and there. In this way one experiences one's body *through* an act of breathing, which is why the Buddha said that body, as one of the foundations of mindfulness, is brought to fulfilment in the practice of *ānāpānasati*. [14]

By being able to see peripherally that which appears as peripheral, but simultaneously present, one does not conceive it. It is the intention in regard to the peripheral, [15] which tends to make things *actual* [16] that carries appropriation. If one succeeds in leaving it peripheral (i.e. the way it has arisen), one is practicing mindfulness correctly. The tendency towards 'conceivings' will slowly fade when the mindfulness reaches the necessary extent. Again, *knowledge* of what the conceiving is (i.e. not understanding the phenomenon of simultaneously and dependently present and *leaving it* as such), is an absolute requirement, because without it this whole practice won't bear fruits of any fundamental importance. However, even a *puthujjana*, by trying to understand what the correct practice of mindfulness is, might actually understand it, and then cease to be a *puthujjana*, so this whole practice should be encouraged regardless.[17]

6. The contemporary Buddhist outlook usually equates the practice of *ānāpānasati* with the practice of *jhāna*s, and if not regarded as same, it is too often thought that by practicing *ānāpānasati* one will by default "enter" a *jhāna*. I suspect this assumption stems from the commentarial times, whereby various meditation techniques, that revolve around the idea of the mindfulness of breathing, were concocted and advertised as something that would directly lead to the experience of *jhāna*s. [18]

*Jhāna*s are the establishments of mind, and as such they are to be developed upon the sufficient degree of mindfulness, which in return can be established upon various different things, *ānāpānasati* being one of them. [19] Thus, it should be clear, that the practice of *jhāna* is a fundamentally different practice from *ānāpānasati*. While *ānāpānasati* shares a nature of the *phenomenological* exercise of one's actions in regard to body, feelings, mind and thoughts, *jhāna* is less of that, but more of *an establishment* of one's mind upon *a certain way of attending to things* (in this case upon a phenomenological surmounting of *the sensual domain*), and the discernment involved therein. In other words, by *understanding* what *jhāna* is, one enters it,[20] not by performing a set of prescribed motions that somehow make it "happen" to one.

Obviously, one can develop and establish an unwavering mindfulness through the practice of *ānāpānasati*, and once established one could *change one's outlook* and with such mindfulness recognize the *extent of sensuality*, as a phenomenon, and what exactly it *entails*, and by doing so step outside of it, so to speak. In this way one would enter the first *jhāna*, where that mindfulness would remain fully established and can be developed even further.[21] It is clear here that it is not that *ānāpānasati* in itself took one automatically into a *jhāna*, but that the change of *attending to things did*,[22] once the mindfulness was strong enough. Furthermore, *jhāna* is not taught as a goal in itself, as *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* (MN 119) tells us, but as one of the forms that can bring one's mindfulness to the necessary fulfillment.

So, in order for any of these paragraphs to be intelligible, one will have to abandon the notions of "meditation techniques" and all the contemporary ideas of the practice of concentration, which is usually taught at

[14]The same principle applies to the other foundations, namely – feelings, mind and thoughts.

[15]That which is simultaneously present, but "less" there, less actual.

[16]Or: "Right in front of us"; to "take them up."

[17]This doesn't mean that any (i.e. all sorts of contradictory) practice of meditation is being endorsed here. This is because, it is for certain that for a puthujjana, no matter how much effort he makes, if the practice he has chosen or been given is inherently wrong, no right results can come from it. One does not accidentally become sotāpanna, it doesn't "happen to one" as a blessing. One builds it up, develops it and attains it through "manly efforts," as the Suttas often say, and because it was not given to one, it cannot be taken away.

[18]Which inevitably acquired countless mystical connotations that they maintain to this day.

[19]Cf. SN 54:8.

[20]Cf. SN 40:1.

[21]Cf. MN 119.

[22]Cf. SN 54:8.

the expense of mindfulness and with underlying wrong views (such as mystical absorptions and novelty experiences that then become a measure of one's "success"). When a person hears the term *ānāpānasati*, he will be better off thinking "development of mindfulness" – the samemindfulness that he has to varying extents in his day-to-day experiences.

7. "Meditation techniques" are usually sets of fairly random motions and performances, idiosyncratic to the particular meditation teacher, that require one to follow certain prescribed steps which if performed correctly, and with some luck, will make one experience "something". Often, in return, that same teacher would have to "interpret" back these experiences for one.

To put it bluntly: if one needs to be *told* by *another*, what the *significance* of one's experience was, this means one has not *understood* it *by oneself*. It means one is still concerned with the particular aspects (i.e. the random contents) of one's meditation experience, and one fails to see the general *nature* of it all. As a result, any external interpretation is regarded as an *explanation*, which means that phenomenology remains buried deep down under layers of pre-concieved ideas and assumptions. This holds true even more when it comes to the idea of "attainments", which are also regarded as experiences that "happen" to one, almost against one's will and as a result of "a very good technique" one has employed. There is a concealed irony there that escapes such people, because if one needs to be "confirmed" a *sotāpanna*, for example, by one's teacher, this means one doesn't know that one actually is a *sotāpanna*, which means that one can still *doubt it*, which in return means that one is not freed from the fetter of doubt, i.e. actually not a *sotāpanna*. The irony is further amplified if the teacher goes ahead and "confirms" one. If one is to actually understand what "being free from doubt" (and the other two fetters, characteristic of the *sotāpanna*) is, one would realize how *non-applicable* any external affirmation or denial is.[23]

How obstructive to phenomenology (i.e. mindfulness) this whole way of practising is, can be seen from the nature of *understanding*. One understands things when one *understands* them, when the knowledge in *regard to the nature* of an arisen thing is there, and not when one successfully goes through a set of methods and observances that relies on almost mechanical set of motions one has to perform attentively. Any bodily act and any act that pertains to the bodily domain (such as the celebrated and misguided notion of "sensations" [24] which involve observing different parts and aspects of one's body) is simply irrelevant for the discerning of the *nature* of an arisen phenomenon. [25] It is misleading and obstructive, because it is impossible to engage in a technique without the implicit belief that a set of motions, that the chosen technique consists of, performed in a particular mechanical order, will *somehow*, by itself, *reveal* the nature of things. By holding this *belief* and *faith* in a technique, one will not be *trying* to understand things, and by not making attempts toward the understanding, one will definitely remain devoid of it.

One sees things correctly – as phenomena – by *understanding* what the phenomenon is, and there is no technique that can make this magically occur. Thus, the closest to what *one should do* in order to obtain understanding is: *trying to understand*. For as long as a person is attempting to understand and see the nature of an arisen thing, that person might actually succeed in it, for it is certain that understanding cannot occur in someone who is not trying to understand. Incidentally (or not), there is never any mention of meditation techniques in the Suttas, but 'understanding' and 'discernment', as a way to reach the final freedom from suffering, is described and referred to countless times.

When one looks at the experience mindfully, it becomes apparent that regardless of the content of the particular experience, the nature of experience is present. So, whether it is the experience of "impatiently-waiting-for-a-bus," or the experience of tiredness after a physical exertion, or strange and novel experience of a powerful light that occurred in front of me while meditating on a seven-day technique-based meditation retreat, all I should be concerned about is that *an experience* is *there* and as such it needs to be *understood*. [26]

[23] Cf. Sn 1:3,21 (verse 55).

[24] Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Clearing the Path, p. 75.

[25] In other words, it is impossible to perform an action which in and by itself would be able to overcome the nature of action, which is the whole point of the Buddhist practice: overcoming kamma. Through action, good or bad or neutral, all one accomplishes is the maintenance of the nature of action: by acting, one remains bound by action. If this would not be the case, the Buddha and the Dhamma would not be required for the freedom from suffering, and all one would have to do is simply perform certain things and by doing so, automatically reach nibbāna, or even better: all one would have to do is choose to be in nibbāna and one would attain it.

[26] And one also comes to realize that for as long as one is alive, experience is always there, and one doesn't have to do anything in

This means that investing effort into meditation techniques is fundamentally a waste of time if one is concerned with understanding the Dhamma, and the most one can accomplish is relaxation, a sense of peace coming from withdrawal from the habitual world of senses, or – worse – fortification of the wrong views based on a misinterpretation of the *nature of* the novelty experiences. Either way, the results of any technique one might engage in, will remain *worldly*, and will draw its power from a temporary change of one's environment, one's usual way of regarding things. In any case, the "benefits" and "helpfulness" of a chosen technique will simply share the nature of a phenomenon of *novelty* that one is experiencing. As such, it means it will run out, and one will have to either do it harder, or change the technique.

If people attend meditation retreats as a form of a temporary escape from the busy and oppressing world, by all means they should do it, as often as they can. However, rather than engaging in a practice of a technique and "sensation watching," they would be better off using their quiet time in trying to understand the nature of things according to the way the Buddha described it, whether sitting, walking or lying down. For it is that "nature" which the Dhamma means and refers to, and anything that is not dealing with this, or anything that is obscuring that very nature (i.e. phenomena) of things, Fconsequently is not the Dhamma, no matter how "helpful" and "useful" it might be. [27] In different words, one's experience is phenomenological (i.e. the five aggregates are all simultaneously present in their respective domains), and this means that nature of things comes *first*, [28] before anything one *does* based on that nature. Doing a technique in order to practice the Dhamma (i.e. see the nature of things) is like exiting the house, so as to be in it. It's a contradiction in terms.

8. In the first establishment of mind, the first *jhāna*, the appropriation of the bodily action (intention) ceases. This is accomplished when that *thought*, which in ordinary experience *stands for* that which is the body (and anything originating from it) is seen in its phenomenological nature, i.e. *as thought.* [29]When the mind is thus established upon the signs and characteristics of one's *thought*, as an arisen *thing*, that thought is recognized as being *indifferent*[30] to anything other then itself, such as body and matter.[31] Through that very indifference, the thought, even if it thinks about the body and anything bodily, ceases to stand for 'that' which is the body (*rūpa*). This is why the first *jhāna* is primarily characterized by thinking-and-pondering (*vittakavicāra*) and it is also why the sensual domain (i.e. domain that is pertaining to the body) has been surmounted. The result of this cessation is the subsiding of speech – the physical, bodily aspect of it. By dropping the appropriation of the bodily intention, through the surmounting of its whole domain, one clearly sees the whole *body* as an independent thing, just sitting there, already given. Even if one is to make a bodily intention, one would see that intention too, as something that is inevitably and inseparably confined to the bodily domain and as such: as something that can never be "*mine*". This is why the first establishment of mind is also sufficient for the final knowledge.[32]

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order for it to be so. And this is where the real purpose of a meditation technique becomes apparent: one is after a particular type of experience (regarded as more desirable and lofty) as a form of replacement or escape from another type of experience (regarded as undesirable and unpleasant). "I want to experience this, I don't want to experience that (or lack-of-this). Thus, all one is trying to do is experience pleasant by directly displacing unpleasant, i.e. one wants to fulfill one immediate desires. For as long as one remains concerned and puts value on the particulars of an experience, the nature of it will remain unknown. This is the reason why any meditation of this kind is a meditation that is utterly within the sensual domain and cannot go beyond it, which is what MN 108 (iii, 14) refers to.

[27]People themselves might often struggle to reconcile the nature of meditation techniques with the nature of the Buddha's Teaching, but they usually end up ignoring this because it feels like the immediate application of a technique is helping them and makes them feel better. The problem with this is that they, as puthujjanas, have no criteria to determine what "helpful" really is. Thus, they just end up following their own feelings and assumptions again, but this time on the pretext of Buddhism and spiritual practice.

[28]One can be ignorant of the phenomenological nature only because that nature is there, present.

[29]Cf. my essay Not Perceiveing the Feeling (Meanings, p. 43) where I said that it is the feeling that feels, perception that perceives and thought that thinks (I am paraphrasing).

[30]This is a type of structural indifference and this can be understood in terms of the superimposition of the respective domains of body (matter) and thoughts. Both of these domains are simultaneously present, but they don't interfere – they are "indifferent" to each other. Furthermore, it is not just that they don't interfere, it is that they cannot interfere, even if one is to want it. This principle actually applies to the whole experience, namely: the five aggregates. Crossing from one domain into another is structurally inconceivable, but as long as one does not fully understand that, by not-understanding one conceives it. For more on this cf. my essays The Infinity of the Mind and Not Perceiving the Feeling (Meanings, p. 39 and p.43).

[31]And this very indifference was obscured through the assumption of 'body' (i.e. matter) in one's thoughts. Cf. Resistance and Designation (Meanings, p. 47).

[32]"Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints occurs in dependence on the first jhāna…" – AN 9:36.

Furthermore, it is because of this very principle of thought ceasing to 'stand for' that which is the body, that the *jhāna*s are wholesome in themselves, even if not accompanied by understanding. By "ceasing to stand for" the *wrong order* of the experience is *reversed*, and the structurally independent, simultaneously present and indifferent to each other individual domains of the aggregates are experienced *as they are*, without the distortion introduced by *assumption* in regard to them. This is why the Buddha praised the practice of *jhāna*, because if the person develops them correctly, even as a *puthujjana*, he would require very little instruction in order to understand things and remove all conceivings and *avijjā*.

by Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

## Feelings are Suffering

How should one free oneself from suffering?

The very first step that one should make is to learn how not to *crave* the cessation of suffering. At first glance this might seem simple, but actually it is not so straightforward at all; for we cannot assume that an untrained, ordinary person even knows what truly suffering is.

In order to know *dukkha* it is not enough just to suffer. To know *dukkha*, one has to recognize, within the present experience, what *is* and what *is not* necessary. The point is that, in the experience of pain, certain aspects are inevitable, while others, are not. In different words – the 'painfulness' of pain is suffering and not the pain itself.

Let me get back to the opening statement that one should not crave the cessation of suffering; why is that essential? The *immediate reason* of our suffering, as the Buddha tells us, is our craving or *taṇha*. It is because of *taṇha* that our experience of pain is *painful*. This applies to the other two kinds of feeling too. Thus, we can say, that it is because of craving that *feelings* are *dukkha*. In the first type, unpleasant feeling, craving for the *cessation* of that feeling causes one to suffer: the painful feeling is present there, directly opposed to one's desire for it to not-be, to disappear. In this way a discrepancy is created, a discrepancy which is nothing but *dukkha*. In the second type, pleasant feeling, craving for *more* of that feeling is manifested, thus the *actual* pleasant feeling appears as unpleasant, when attended from the direction of that increased pleasure which is *craved for*. The present feeling of pleasure becomes inadequate, a lack which needs to be satisfied. Again, the discrepancy arises, which one tries to overcome by a further pursuit of various things in the world which, will *intensify* his pleasure further. One hopes that such attempt will 'fill the gap' within, but needless to say, that is impossible since the discrepancy is actually being constantly *generated* by the presence of *taṇha*, and *not* by the various objects in the world.

"Thought and lust are a man's sensuality,

Not the various things in the world;

Thought and lust are a man's sensuality,

The various things just stand there in the world;

But the wise get rid of desire therein."

– A.VI 63/iii, 411

When it comes to third type, neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feelings (i.e. neutral), suffering is experienced as a result of one craving *for feelings* themselves, since neutral feeling is not recognized at all:

"Neutral feeling is pleasant when known [as such],

and unpleasant when not-known [as such]"

– M. 44/i, 303

So, to summarize, one's experience of pain is *not* the reason for one's suffering. It is rather the presence of craving, in one's experience, that suffering *is there*. As long as this remains the case, one will be a "victim" of one's own feelings, be they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

by Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

## Existence means control

In order for something to exist (*bhava*), in order for it to be, in a full and appropriated sense, that thing has to be given first, in the form of an experience as a whole. When I say 'given', this should be understood in the sense that we can only "find" things as already being there, in the world. (Cf. Sartre's statement in *Being & Nothingness* that every thing comes *with* past). The fact is that things can only be found when they are attended to and this means that – fundamentally speaking – they are *beyond* one's control[33]: one is not their *creator*. Thus, one's experience as a whole *cannot* be controlled; the most a person can do is to modify an already given state of affairs, on a more particular level.

Take the five-aggregates as an example: their nature is to appear, disappear, and change while standing, at *their own accord*. It is only with *upādāna* that this characteristic is obscured[34], and in such cases the apparent Self becomes the fundamental agent of the process instead, or at least this is how it appears to a *puthujjana*. One who is not free from *upādāna*, and the Self-view, confuses the fact that the five-aggregates (or in this case the five-holding-aggregates) *can* be modified or affected once they arise, with the notion that they are controlled. This notion of control also supports (or feeds) the view that 'Self' is their creator, which in return feeds that notion, and so on indefinitely. This is why with 'Self' there comes the perception of *mastery* over one's experience – "*Attā*, 'self', is fundamentally a notion of *mastery over things*." (Ñāṇavīra Thera, *Notes on Dhamma*, DHAMMA)

The Self then, as a "master", appears as something different, something *apart* from the five-holding-aggregates. Furthermore, the Self keeps finding proof for its existence by constantly interfering and modifying (when possible) the arisen states of the five-holding-aggregates. The Self finds pleasure in doing so.

On the other hand, if the Self would see that, despite all of the proof, its mastery actually *requires* (or *directly depends* upon) the five-aggregates, the notion of control would cease[35]. It becomes clear that 'Self' cannot possibly exercise any fundamental control over their appearing, disappearing, and change while standing. This is why by contemplating this long enough, one can become an *arahat*:

"Then, monks, at another time the Buddha Vipassī dwelt contemplating the appearing and disappearing of the five-holding-aggregates… And as he remained contemplating the appearing and disappearing of the five-holding-aggregates, before long his mind was freed from the fetters without remainder." (Mahāpadāna Sutta, D. 14/ii, 35)

Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

## With birth, Death applies

1. We are born. We come into this world through our birth. As we shall see in the following paragraphs, there are many ways that one *can* think of one's birth. However, from a phenomenological point of view our birth is always here *with* us. The fact that one is constantly engaged with the world of one's desires, decisions and miseries, means that one is born – his birth is *present*. Obviously, for someone not used to thinking phenomenologically, it might be fairly difficult to pull oneself out of the habitual way of regarding things as something which is clearly defined, something palpable in one's experience. For such a person 'birth' *is* an event from the past, and we shall address this issue in the paragraphs to follow. However, there is also a simpler and easily overlooked reason for one failing to grasp the phenomenological description of 'birth'. In our language the term 'birth', as a designation of experience, carries certain *past* connotations. These connotations are absolutely gratuitous, and we shall see that the reason for that lies in people's *views*

[33] Even if one can control them, first they have to be. In other words – the nature of control is seen as something beyond our control.

[34] As a matter of fact, it's not only the characteristic that is obscured, the five-aggregates are not seen either, most of the time.

[35] For a puthujjana it is not enough to see this once. It is only with the repetition of this insight (achieved through effort), that the habitual view of control will disappear, and be replaced (gradually too) with the view of an inherent lack of control – the view of impermanence. When it is seen that impermanence underlies every project of the Self, the Self ceases to be Self, since without its mastery, selfhood cannot stand. (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Notes on Dhamma, PARAMATTHA SACCA, para. 6)

(*diṭṭhi*). The established usage of terminology draws its significance (i.e. the meaning of its words) from the most *common* views (on the level of humanity or a particular culture), about the nature of experience. Needless to say, the common views are rarely correct, especially when it comes to the experience of an individual. These views can never represent the real *order of things*. Thus, apart from the way we speak, and use the language, nothing requires us to think that birth can, and shall *only* be understood as a past event which has started and ended *in* time.

2. Naturally, it is possible for one to regard, and understand to a certain extent, birth as something which has happened to him a long time ago, even without having the actual memory of the event. However, this kind of limited understanding is only possible in the *objective* (scientific) *view* of the world, and oneself. We can even go a step further and say that it is precisely *because* of that view that one thinks of birth (and other things, including ageing-and-death) in these temporal categories. With this kind of view, the objective world in front of one, the world which is *in* time, takes precedence over one's experience as such, which is *of* time (cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, *Notes on Dhamma*, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, Dynamic Aspect, para. 5). One starts regarding the objects that appear *through* one's experience, as something more fundamental than the experience itself – he puts second that which is to come first, and he puts first that which is to come second.[36] As a result of this one starts regarding oneself objectively as also being *in* time. Thus, time develops into a category which has become *external* to everything, and all of the things appear as being "within" it[37]. Therefore, one sees that others are born, their event of birth occurs in time, when he observes it externally. But because he views himself externally too, he naturally (i.e. in conformity with his view) comes to assume that his birth has *also* occurred some time ago in the past. One also assumes, since he can see it in his everyday experience, that death *will* happen to him in that same 'external' sense, "as it happens to others all the time". By regarding things in this way, he, as an individual, does not feel threatened by any of it, until the *actual* death comes of course. So, we can see that one doesn't adopt this objective view voluntarily – when *avijjā* is present, the view is developed naturally as the quickest way of offering one assurance from a threatening world. The world and one's experience becomes explainable and measurable – one has regained *control*.

Let us get back to the phenomenon of 'birth', we were discussing. The Buddha referred to 'birth' as: "Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-being, coming-forth, manifestation of aggregates, and acquisition of [sense] spheres of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth." (Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, M. 9/i 50)

Thus, although we can agree that birth is some sort of a "beginning", so to speak, a "manifestation of the aggregates", what obliges us to think that that beginning has *ended* there? The fact that one keeps accepting and using the five-aggregates, the fact that one is constantly involved with the world of one's senses, doesn't that mean that one's *manifestation* of aggregates is *present*[38]? And would one be able to desire various things in the world, if those things were not manifested? If one were able to relinquish any attachment for his own body, would one be bothered when that body falls apart and dies? It is because one *affirms* that manifestation of the five-aggregates, through desire-and-lust for them, that the manifestation *exists*, it comes-into-being – with being, birth is (*bhavapaccayā jāti*). And when one regards it as 'mine', one ages, falls sick and dies (and also experiences any other misery possible in this life) – with birth, ageing-and-death (*jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ*…). If there is no being whatsoever, would manifestation be able to manifest itself?

[36]Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his Phenomenology of Perception, (Routledge Classics, 2007, p. 82): I detach myself from my experience and pass to the idea. Like the object, the idea purports to be the same for everybody, valid in all times and places, and the individuation of an object in an objective point of time and space finally appears as the expression of a universal positing power. I am no longer concerned with my body, nor with time, nor with the world, as I experience them in antepredicative knowledge, in the inner communion that I have with them. I now refer to my body only as a idea, to the universe as idea, to the idea of space and the idea of time. Thus 'objective' thought (in Kierkegaard's sense) is formed – being that of common sense and of science – which finally causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and the natural sequel. The whole life of consciousness is characterized by the tendency to posit objects, since it is consciousness, that is to say self-knowledge, only in so far as it takes hold of itself and draws itself together in an identifiable object. And yet the absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it.

[37]Time, as a phenomena in one's experience, is regarded as more primordial (read – 'permanent'), than the experience of things. The things seem to come and go, while the sense of time stays.

[38]Furthermore, nothing obliges us to think that 'manifestation of aggregates' refers to the event of coming-out-of-womb. The Buddha has said that "when mother and father come together and the mother is in season and the one to be tied is present, with the coming together of these three things, there is descent into the womb" (M. 38/i 265-66). Thus, the five-aggregates are already manifested, in a way, even at the stage of an embryo, and before the infant is formed. (Cf. also A.III, 61/i, 176-7)

And if nothing manifested, would one be able to appropriate it? And if there is nothing which belongs to one, would one suffer on account of those things breaking up and disappearing? No, because one has escaped.

3. Let us go back to the question of when birth ends. Actually, we can even ask when does birth start? The common view is that first one is conceived, and than, after nine months or so, things culminate in one being born. But when does the conception take place or when *exactly* is one born? Is it with the formation of an embryo or with cutting of the umbilical cord? Generally, the accepted view is that birth is over when the baby comes out of the womb and into the world. And when it comes to 'general views', we all know that people often tend to blindly comply to them, taking them for granted for the most (or whole) of their lives, without even realizing they are doing so. In this case, 'birth' becomes that which accords to the majority of opinions on that subject. One chooses to conform with "what everyone else thinks", since the majority is "always in the right". One accepts Heidegger's impersonal 'They' as a dictator of one's own values, one finds *safety* in doing so. However, no matter how secure the majority's view might seem, all it takes is for someone else to come along and say (perhaps supporting it with "the latest medical research") that birth actually ends when the formation of an infant is completed in the womb, and that coming out of the mother is not relevant as such, to question of birth itself. (Though, for parents, even if they happen to be those scientists, this is probably *the most* relevant part[39].) If his utterance manages to change the general opinion, if the majority of people come to accept it, we will have a new, "more accurate" view on the nature of birth. The majority might have been wrong earlier, but now it is in the right… until it changes. And one can again choose to conform to that majority and make a choice out of it, but no matter how far one goes that choice will always remain *personal*, and as such, be on the level of *an individual*. So, although one thinks what everybody else does, one nevertheless remains *responsible* for that very thinking. It becomes clear then that by choosing the majority's opinion on a certain subject (in this case 'birth), out of 'faith' in modern science (or religion) perhaps, a person chooses *his individual view* on given subject. So, by deciding to accept the scientific explanation of birth, one decides that birth, for him, is something observable, an event in the world. Thus, whether one is aware of it or not, one is responsible for the *meaning* of things in one's experience. Even if we go further and say that we could pinpoint the exact *moment* of birth[40], when, for example, conception takes place, and even if the whole of humanity, without an exception, agreed upon it, nevertheless, this would not escape the *nature* of 'view', and that is to be 'imposed' onto things in one's experience, while at the same time directly depending upon them. In our case that would most likely be the 'objective view', which is of course, based on personal preferences and inclinations[41]. Thus, for a *puthujjana* coming-out-of-womb *is that* which is birth. His birth *exists.*

The Buddha, on the other hand, talks about the *nature* of birth, as a phenomena (*dhamma*), in one's experience. He does not refer to birth as an occurrence in time, upon which even *puthujjanas* cannot agree, and this can be seen from the usual *paṭiccasamuppāda* (*p.s.*) description. In this description, *jāti* refers to that 'nature' of birth and any temporal events are completely irrelevant to it. If there is no 'birth' whatsoever, if there is no manifestation (as such) of the aggregates, a *puthujjana* would not be able to regard any event (in this case

[39] And therefore it is not accidental that this is most commonly regarded as birth.

[40] This, in itself, is clearly impossible, since the "exactness", in any area of science, is determined by the capacities of one's perception (i.e. the refinement of our technology and observational instruments). (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Notes on Dhamma, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, Static Aspect, para. 16.)

[41] It is very unlikely that the whole of humanity could actually agree on this (or anything), since all people are not the same. The birth of a baby, in this case, carries different significance for different individuals. A mother might say that her baby was born the moment she held it in her arms, and that it was conceived the moment she fell in love with its father. A scientist, in his carefully cultivated attitude of disinterestedness, might say that a baby is conceived when embryo cells become discernible (he observes it under his microscope!), and perhaps that it is born when it starts to breathe independently. For a doctor, involved in performing abortions, there is no question of 'baby' (i.e. 'human'), until three months are due. Thus, it is how one feels towards 'birth', how one perceives it, how one intends it, that determines what that birth is for him. ("Contacted, monks, one feels; contacted, one intends; contacted, one perceives." – Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta, iv,10.) Also, compare the passage from the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta, M. 18/i 111-112: Dependent on the eye and forms (ear, nose…) eye consciousness arise. The meeting of three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling. What man feels, that he perceives. What he perceives, that he thinks about. What he thinks about that he diversifies. With what he diversified as the source calculations about perceptions of diversification occupy a man with respect to past, future and present.

'coming-out-of-womb') as *his*[42] birth[43]. Thus, one doesn't suffer on account of birth as an event in the past, one suffers on account of the *nature* of birth in the *present*. In *p.s.* context, 'birth' structurally *precedes* 'ageing-and-death'. 'Ageing-and-death' is not 'birth', but they wouldn't be without it – together they arise, together they cease. So, it is that with 'birth', 'ageing-and-death' (and 'sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair') *apply*. Consequently, if we were to discuss *jāramaraṇaṃ*, we could say that it is because ageing-and-death is *present*, that one will age and die (and suffer) *in* time. But, if one could manage, through an understanding of the Dhamma, to free oneself from 'being' – to bring it to an end – ' birth' and 'ageing-and-death' would cease to exist for him: all of the temporal occasions for suffering would cease to be *his* suffering, since by not-being born, one doesn't have the desire to interfere with them any more – one is free.

5. Let me just say something more, for those who find it difficult to accept that the existential (phenomenological) method[44] can validly be applied to Dhamma. We can put aside Sartre, Heidegger and those like them, and disregard what they have to say about birth. However, even in that case, still, we need look no further than the *p.s.* description in order to see what the Buddha meant by 'birth'. In Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, M. 9/i 50, it is said, as we already referred to it earlier on:

When a noble disciple has thus understood birth, the origin of birth, the cessation of birth, and the way leading to the cessation of birth… he here and now makes an end of suffering. In that way too a noble disciple is one of right view… and has arrived at this true Dhamma.

Thus, a Noble disciple, an *ariyasāvaka*, can by understanding 'birth', in the same sense that he would have understood the Four Noble Truths – directly and timelessly – free oneself and become an *arahat*. So, one may rightly ask now: would this be possible, if 'birth' were not already somehow *present*[45], as a phenomena, in our experience? How would one be able to understand birth directly and without involving time? If one's birth was indeed a distant event, in some maternity ward perhaps, one's fate would be sealed according to the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, since the event of birth has already passed and cannot possibly be understood directly. Fortunately, one's birth is not *in* the past, so one can, if one chooses to follow the Buddha's Teaching, cease to, in the present, regard 'birth' as his and by doing so remove himself from the domain of ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. One can escape.

Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

## Appearance and Existence

For a *puthujjana* the world exists. He can perceive things in that world, see them appear and disappear, he can see them changing. A *puthujjana* can also affect his surroundings and modify things according to own preferences, pursue the desirable experiences and avoid the undesirable ones—the *puthujjana* is *involved*. This 'involvement' with things represents the very core of the *puthujjana*'s 'experience as a whole'. Most people spend the majority of their lives obliviously absorbed in it, taking the course of 'involvement' for

[42] Compare this passage from J.P. Sartre – Existentialism is Humanism, chapter on 'Freedom and Responsibility': Yet I find an absolute responsibility for the fact that my facticity (here the fact of my birth) is directly inapprehensible and even inconceivable, for this fact of my birth never appears as a brute fact but always across a projective reconstruction of my for-itself. I am ashamed of being born or I rejoice over it, or in attempting to get rid of my life I affirm that I live and I assume this life as bad. Thus in a certain sense I choose to be born. This choice itself is integrally affected with facticity since I am not able not to choose, but this facticity in turn will appear only in so far as I surpass it toward my ends. Thus facticity is everywhere, but inapprehensible; I never encounter anything except my responsibility. That is why I can not ask, "Why was I born?" or curse the day of my birth or declare that I did not ask to be born, for these various attitudes towards my birth – i.e., toward the fact that I realize a presence in the world – are absolutely nothing else but ways of assuming this birth in full responsibility and of making it mine.

[43] This can be stated even more precisely: the temporal things (events in time) are possible only because there is an atemporal structure (nature of time) – time is secondary to one's experience. Hence, the p.s. is said to be akālika, 'timeless'. (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Notes on Dhamma, NP. & FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE). That is why, in the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, M. 9, we can see that a Noble disciple can, by understanding 'being', 'birth' or 'ageing-and-death' respectively, come to the same result – complete freedom from suffering, arahatship. P.s. can be understood by understanding all or any of its "pairs", since each of them represent, or rather are, the principle of simultaneous dependent origination – 'when this, this is' (imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti).

[44] We are not interested in the conclusions (or lack of them, as Ven. Ñāṇavīra would say) they drew from the method itself.

[45] Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, op. cit., NP., para. 9 & 10. This 'somehow' is important to note. If a puthujjana, who is not satisfied with the idea of birth being something which occurred in his past, admits that there has to be some other way in which 'birth' can be present, and if he admits that he doesn't see that way, he might make the effort to find it out, and than eventually see it.

granted.[46]

It needs to be understood that these 'objects', which the *puthujjana* is fundamentally involved with, are *things* which his experience is inseparable from, for the simple virtue of being *his experience of those things*. For this reason we have to broaden the meaning of the term 'things', from usually denominating 'objects' in one's surroundings, to include *any* experience whatsoever that arises and can be discerned internally or externally (whether it is 'objects', 'tools', emotions' or 'thoughts'). In that way the term 'things' would correspond to what is meant by Pāli term *'dhamma'*. Thus, the experience of the *puthujjana*'s everyday world, his possessions, his desires and fears, anxieties and happiness are all *things* or *phenomena*. All these phenomena are completely *unknown* in their *nature*. This is why it is crucial for a *puthujjana* to recognize that a nature of a thing *exists*. This existence is not 'in' the world of the objects that are ready-to-hand, not 'in' his mind, not even between the two—but, a thing exists as an *experience*. Strictly speaking that's all that can be truthfully said, without resorting to presupposed theories, inductive observations and explanations of the experience—the only thing that a *puthujjana* can know for certain is that 'there is an experience'. In this way it can be seen that a thing *is,* its 'being' appears and things such as pleasure, pain, emotional states, ideas, abstractions etc. that people have in their everyday lives, are in this way all *real*, they all come to exist as something that is there, that has *appeared*. No matter how ordinary or extraordinary one's experience is or might be, whether it is common or unusual, that experience exists *as such*. Even if one is going through the most obscure, ambiguous states of one's mind, those very states are valid in their nature (as obscure, as ambiguous); whether they are intimate and subjective or the most impersonal objective facts—they are all *phenomena*, they constitute the experience as a whole (which is also a *phenomenon*).

"We do not *know* what 'Being' means. But even if we ask, 'What *is* "Being"?', we keep within an understanding of the 'is', though we are unable to fix conceptually what that 'is' signifies. We do not even know the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed. *But this vague average understanding of Being is still a Fact.*

However much this understanding of Being (an understanding which is already available to us) may fluctuate and grow dim, and border on mere acquaintance with a word, its very indefiniteness is itself a positive phenomenon which needs to be clarified.[47]

The same is to be said for the even more complex categories of the *puthujjana*'s world, such as 'actions', 'choices', notions of 'good' and 'bad' and similar. They are not exempt from the phenomenological nature of things. Good or bad, skilful or not, these things *manifest* in one's experience, and as such: they are real.

A very common passage from the Suttas which describes that which is known as the 'mundane' Right View:

*Atthi dinnaṃ, atthi yiṭṭhaṃ, atthi hutaṃ, atthi sukatadukkaṭānaṃ kammānaṃ phalaṃ vipāko, atthi ayaṃ loko, atthi paro loko, atthi mātā, atthi pitā, atthi sattā opapātikā, atthi loke samaṇabrāhmaṇā sammaggatā sammāpaṭipannā ye imañca lokaṃ parañca lokaṃ sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedentī'ti*

"There is what is given and what is offered and what is sacrificed; there is fruit and result of good and bad actions; there is this world and the other world; there is mother and father; there are spontaneously reborn beings; there are in the world good and virtuous recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world." (MN 117/iii,72)

This easily overlooked passage offers a very acute description of an *authentic* attitude of a *puthujjana*—the attitude of recognition and acknowledgment of the existence of things *as* phenomena (*"there is…"*). Someone might argue that one does not necessarily see the spontaneously reborn beings for example, but the point is that one should recognize the mere fact that there *could be* spontaneously reborn beings—the *possibility* of spontaneously reborn beings *exists* as such. And if one recognizes the validity of the appearance and

[46]"Husserl attempts to make the natural attitude descriptively evident by pointing out that our everyday way of going about our business—dealing with things of all sorts, other people, engaged in scientific activities, recreation, and so on – involves various modalities of"belief." I simply take for granted that what I am dealing with exists and is, more or less, as it presents itself as being. Furthermore, "other actual objects are there for me as determinate, as more or less well known, without being themselves perceived or, indeed, present in any other mode of intuition" (Husserl 1982: 51)—that is, they belong within a co-intended horizon of "indeterminate actuality" (Husserl 1982:52)."—'The Blackwell Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism', Husserlian Phenomenology (by Simon Crowell), p. 19.

[47]Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, translated by J. Macquarrie and E.S. Robinson. London: SCM Press, 1962, p. 25.

existence of that possibility, an *expectation of the concrete proof* that can be obtained only through *senses* (i.e. one needs to *see* those beings) ceases to be relevant, in the same way that a view that a thing exists only if it can be experienced through the senses ceases. This attitude thus discloses the *priority* of the *phenomenal nature of things* (of one's experience), over any other view which does not assert that priority. And it is because of this very lack of the correct priority that these kinds of views are *wrong views* (as far as freedom from suffering is concerned). Thus, whatever one's experience is, whichever shape it might take—big or small, important or not, clear or ambiguous—that experience is *there* in its own phenomenological form. This by no means implies that such experience is necessarily understood, it simply means that it is recognized for what it is, even if that is as"something-which-is-not-understood". This kind of 'acknowledgement' is the authenticity that we also find the existential philosophers often referring to. Together with authenticity, there comes the sense of the *fundamental responsibility* for one's own existence[48] which is a necessary prerequisite for a *puthujjana*'s 'mundane' Right View[49] (which can then lead further onwards toward the 'supramundane' Right View—the view of the Path). The reason why this attitude is a necessary prerequisite is because only with this attitude will a *puthujjana* be able to *understand* that he *does not understand,* and by doing so enable himself for understanding."[50] The problem is, however, that if a common man denies that which is right in front of him in his day-to-day living, he denies the basic principles of his own experience. In other words he is denying the most immediate *appearance* of things. This results in phenomena not being seen at all. As long as this attitude persists that man is going to be deprived of the possibility of understanding the nature of the experience and consequently the nature of his own suffering. That man is *inauthentic*.[51] As the experience shows us this is all too easily done. All that is required is to simply never question the face value of one's views of the world and the experience and to never look further from one's immediate absorption in things.

For inauthentic man, when he does think about the nature of his experience and the world around him, his views would generally pertain to a common notion of a *hidden reality* behind the everyday world (either material or mental, depending on the direction his mind takes). What is meant by this is that he simply *assumes* that there is something *more* real or fundamental in relation to what he is or can experience. Simply put, if he was to assume a 'mental' type of reality, as something which underlies the present experience, he would fall into (one of the forms of) *idealism*; alternatively, if the reality was to have a more 'material' basis, he would fall into some form of *materialism* (or *realism*).[52] Either way, the *puthujjana* oscillates between the two.[53]

[48] A rather inspired observation of Walter Kaufmann, a distinguished Nietzsche scholar and translator, in his book Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 46: "…perhaps the most compassionate and venerable of all mortals, the Buddha. . . [had said that] all man's alibis are unacceptable: no gods are responsible for his condition; no original sin; no heredity and no environment; no race, no caste, no father, and no mother; no wrong-headed education, no governess, no teacher; not even an impulse or a disposition, a complex or a childhood trauma. Man is free; but his freedom does not look like the glorious liberty of the Enlightenment; it is no longer the gift of God. Once again, man stands alone in the universe, responsible for his condition, likely to remain in a lowly state, but free to reach above the stars."

[49] "There is fruit and result of good and bad action…", i.e.: "I am responsible for what I do". Similarly, "there are… recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves the direct knowledge…" means "Freedom from suffering is possible, and if I don't pursue it, I, myself, am responsible for that. By not pursuing it I am responsible for remaining there where suffering can arise—I am responsible for my suffering."

[50] "It is far better for a man to understand that he does not understand the Dhamma, than it is for him to believe falsely that he does understand it. The former attitude may encourage progress, the latter can only obstruct it."—CtP, pp. 57-58.

[51] For more on the everyday phenomenon of 'inauthenticity' see Hedigger, Being and Time, and J-P. Sartre, Being and Nothingess, particularly the chapter on 'Bad Faith'. See also the following lines from Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript (p. 311): "Science organizes the moments of subjectivity within a knowledge of them, and this knowledge is assumed to be the highest stage, and all knowledge is an abstraction which annuls existence, a taking of the objects of knowledge out of existence. In existence, however, such a principle does not hold. If thought speaks deprecatingly of the imagination, imagination in its turn speaks deprecatingly of thought; and likewise with the feeling. The task is not to exalt the one at the expense of the other, but to give them an equal status, to unify them in simultaneity; the medium in which they are unified is existence."

[52] Ven. Ñāṇavīra observes: "There is, however, another point: an oriented world (which is the meaning of loka in the Suttas) is the correlative of a point of view (there is a SN Sutta that specifically identifies the world with the eye, ear, nose, and so on), and consequently to deny self is to deny the world, and to assert self is to assert the world (so loko so attā). Thus we have the following scheme: Sassatavāda Assert a point of view; Asserts self— atthi attāti; Assert the world; Denies the objective existence of things— sabbaṃ natthīti Is an Idealist (Bradley, Berkeley) Uccedavāda Denies a point of view; Denies self— natthi attāti; Denies the world; Asserts the objective existence of things— sabbaṃ atthīti Is a Realist (Stebbing, Russell) If this analysis is correct it would explain why a scientist, though apparently asserting the permanence of the Universe, is, in fact, an ucchedavādin—the Universe he asserts is without a point of view, and is the negation of the world (= loka)."—StP, p. 186. Also, cf. DN 2, in particular the Ajita Kesakambalin's response.

[53] Cf. StP, p. 323.

For example, in present times, a spiritual/mystical view of the hidden 'Reality' (one's 'true Self', or 'universal consciousness') would be a form of idealism, while the very common and prevalent scientific objectification of the experience would most certainly come under materialism. These two can serve as the two prominent poles of the Wrong View spectrum.[54] These views differ from the Right View because as they are focused on developing and providing *explanations* of the nature of one's experience, while failing to see that fundamentally they are *derived from it*. No matter how plausible and accurate a theory or an explanation of the origins and nature of the experience is, the fact is that experience, as a phenomenon, will always *have to* come *first*. This means that the explanation cannot be applied *retrospectively* to describe its own origin which is *simultaneously present.* Nevertheless, by maintaining this contradiction (which is an *assumption*) the actual *structural order* of the experience is assumed *different*. And since that's all a *puthujjana* has in front of him, that *assumed nature* of the experience *exists as such*. Because of this, the nature of a wrong view is to provide a man with reasons and causes, which achieves nothing except concealing and contradicting the notion of the immediate appearance of things and one's own existential responsibility. When Reality is hidden behind the appearances, which are then no more than 'illusory', whatever a *puthujjana* does and whatever he feels ceases to be *relevant*, even if it's the most immediate and personal suffering. If it isn't irrelevant just yet, a person with this kind of view will certainly strive in order to make it so by blending it into the all-embracing view that the world is nothing more than illusion, and as such whatever comes to be experienced in that world is disregarded because it doesn't belong to Reality. Consequently, by not pertaining to Reality, the things in one's environment can be ignored, and one will feel justified in doing so. Thus, for a *puthujjana* of this kind, things encountered in everyday life don't fit into his *view of reality*—they are dismissed, they are *not understood*.[55] In the view of scientific objectification on the other hand, the *puthujjana*'s actions are neatly explained in terms of various collections of nerve impulses, reflexes, genes, sensations and so on. In this case the significance of one's actions cannot extend beyond the threshold of the molecular compounds of one's body, which then serves as the *reason* (or *excuse*) for the *puthujjana*'s desires, emotions, concerns etc. [56] In both types of views the responsibility for the immediate intentions and decisions is abolished, by way of being included in the mystical or molecular forms (for example "God's Will" or genetic "predispositions")—which serve to explain one's world. In either case that responsibility is not *felt*, its *nature* is *disowned*. (Might this perhaps be the *real purpose* of these views?) Thus, the inauthenticity remains for as long as there is a view which places itself *over* the existence as such, as something which is more primordial in itself: the Reality *behind* or *beneath* the appearance, the molecular structure of the world, again—*beneath* the things in the way

[54]Obviously things can be a bit more complex than this, inasmuch as these opposite views have a lot in common as Merleau-Ponty observes: "We pass from absolute objectivity to absolute subjectivity, but this second idea is not better than the first and is upheld only against it, which means by it. The affinity between intellectualism and empiricism is thus much less obvious and much more deeply rooted than is commonly thought. It arises not only from the anthropological definition of sensation used equally by both, but from the fact that both persist in the natural or dogmatic attitude, and the survival of sensation in intellectualism is merely a sign of this dogmatism. Intellectualism accepts as completely valid the idea of truth and the idea of being in which the formative work of consciousness culminates and is embodied, and its alleged reflection consists in positing as powers of the subject all that is required to arrive at these ideas. The natural attitude, by throwing me into the world of things, gives me the assurance of apprehending a 'real' beyond appearance, the 'true' beyond illusion."—Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 45.

[55]"To have faith in the Reality of the 'external world', whether rightly or wrongly; to"prove" this Reality for it, whether adequately or inadequately; to presuppose it, whether explicitly or not—attempts such as these which have not mastered their own basis with full transparency, presuppose a subject which is proximally worldless or unsure of its world, and which must, at bottom, first assure itself of a world. Thus, from the very beginning, Being-in-a-world is disposed to "take things" in some way [Auffassen], to suppose, to be certain, to have faith—a way of behaving which itself is always a founded mode of Being-in-the-world. The 'problem of Reality' in the sense of the question whether an external world is present-at-hand and whether such world can be proved, turns out to be an impossible one, not because its consequences lead to inextricable impasses, but because the very entity which serves as its theme, is one which, as it were, repudiates any such formulation of the question. Our task is not to prove that an 'external world' is present-at-hand or to show how it is present-at-hand, but to point out why Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, has the tendency to bury the 'external world' in nullity 'epistemologically' before going on to prove it. The reason for this lies in Dasein's falling and in the way in which the primary understanding of Being has been diverted to Being as presence-at-hand—a diversion which is motivated by that falling itself."—Heidegger, op. cit. p. 250.

[56]"Behaviour is thus hidden by the reflex, the elaboration and patterning of stimuli, by a longitudinal theory of nervous functioning, which establishes a theoretical correspondence between each element of the situation and an element of the reaction…"The traditional notion of sensation was not a concept born of reflection, but a late product of thought directed towards objects, the last element in the representation of the world, the furthest removed from its original source, and therefore the most unclear. Inevitably science, in its general effort towards objectification, evolved a picture of the human organism as a physical system undergoing stimuli which were themselves identified by their physico-chemical properties, and tried to reconstitute actual perception on this basis, and to close the circle of scientific knowledge by discovering the laws governing the production of knowledge itself, by establishing an objective science of subjectivity…"—Merleau-Ponty, op. cit. pp. 8, & 12.

we encounter them in the world. Consequently, things like 'good' or 'bad', 'results' (of one's actions), 'being reborn', 'sacrifice', 'other world' and so on[57] have no place in one's experience.[58] As such, they become very ambiguous categories of one's life, which an individual can choose to accept and believe in, or perhaps reject according to his personal choice. (The overall decline of morality in the world indicates which kind of choice prevails.) In this way these things are pushed in the domain of religion and ethics and regarded as 'convictions' and 'observances' that one can follow if one pleases.

Thus, whenever the priority of existence is not recognized, the *nature* of things is obscured. Clearly the practice of Dhamma is then out of the question. Nevertheless, for a *puthujjana* the possibility of seeing the structural priority of existence as a whole over the particular instances his Self derives from it, still remains, and only when he admits this, the real work can begin.

***The Appearance in Its Priority***

So, with the mystical view on one end, and the objective, scientific one on the other, the recognition of one's personal existence cannot arise. Because of these inauthentic attitudes, which are nevertheless *normal* attitudes of the *puthujjana*'s everyday life, it would be correct to say that for him things don't even *exist*, in a correct sense of that word. Only with the development of the rudimentary notions of authenticity, through the practice of mindfulness and restraint and reflection, can a *puthujjana* begin to notice, little by little, the nature of his experience as a whole—*phenomena* can start to *appear*. It is only in this way that one can understand what is meant by the 'being' of things, which is nothing fundamentally different than the 'being' of myself.[59] Through the establishing of authenticity a *puthujjana* can observe that things around him, and his experience as a whole, appear and disappear. In the beginning it seems like this is happening while his *sense of the experience as a whole* stays *unchanged*. This 'unchangedness' holds priority over the *puthujjana*'s experience, and that's because in its nature it presents itself as something which is remaining the *same* or *independent* (i.e. unchanging) throughout the appearance of things which comes and goes. It looks as if things that appear are 'included' within that general non-changing sense of the experience. The appearance of things —or, simply, things *belong* to it. Although there is no concealed 'Being' behind that which appears since the basic authenticity has been established, this nevertheless results in the notion that fundamentally things *are*, and *that is why* they appear. Thus, 'Being' is assumed to be an ontological phenomenon that manifests itself *through* the 'appearance'. One might not be able to find it apart from appearance, but nevertheless, a *puthujjana* thinks—"things exist, that's why they can appear". In this way one assumes the ontological priority of existence over the appearance. Thus, a *puthujjana* places 'being' as that which is *first*. This type of priority of 'being', is the necessary basis for the *puthujjana*'s sense of 'Self'. The notion of constancy, the unchanging nature of the experience as a whole, the independence, is the "extra-temporal changeless 'self"'[60] of the *puthujjana.* '(The being of) Self' is then the reason for things to appear ,they are appearing *for* it.[61] This arrangement, this *particular [dis]order* of things is also called: *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*.

If, presumably, a *puthujjana* wants to abandon this view, which is the root of all suffering, the authentic pursuit must continue. What he has to see is that this notion of 'Self', despite its independent character, also

[57]Things that are not explainable through the observational methods of inductive sciences.

[58]"The theory of sensation, which builds up all knowledge out of determinate qualities, offers us objects purged of all ambiguity, pure and absolute, the ideal rather than the real themes of knowledge."—Merleau-Ponty, op. cit. p. 13.

[59]A reader might notice here the discrepancy between what I've just said and the views one can find in Heidegger's or Sartre's works. These philosophers maintain the notion (in different degrees) of the separation between my being, i. e. the 'I', and being of things, the objects of the experience which 'I' encounters. For example Sartre developed a fundamental division of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, which he then tried, and consequently failed, to reconcile in Being and Nothingess. In-itself is not more real than for-itself, (i. e. 'me' or '[my] consciousness'), and the reverse is also true; in order for it to exist it requires for-itself, as much as for-itself requires the in-itself. And it is not possible, in good faith, to think of or regard the in-itself independently of consciousness, nor consciousness independently of the in-itself, not even in one's imagination. 'Matter', rūpa, needs consciousness in order to find its footing in appearance, without it, it is inconceivable. (Cf. the mutually dependent relationship between nāmarūpa and viññāṇa.) In brief: whenever there are things, there is me; whenever there is me, there are things. (Hence one has to understand sabbe dhamma anatta—all things are not-self.) Whether it is 'being' of things that we are looking at, or my 'being', the point is that there is 'being'—bhava is there. This is also why, the reader will notice I use 'existence' and 'being' interchangeably. Whether it is 'mine', or not, whether it is personal or impersonal, large or small, visible or invisible, far or near, any 'being' whatsoever means that bhava is there; it is, it exists. As long as that is the case, 'I' (or at least some degree of the conceit 'I am') will be present.

[60]NoD, ATTĀ.

[61]"…the phenomenon remains, for"to appear" supposes in essence somebody to whom to appear. "—J.—P. Sartre, Being and Nothingness, translated by Hazel E. Barnes. London: Methuen, 1957, 1969; New York: Philosophical Library, 1957, p. 2.

*appears*. No matter how elusive or ambiguous it might be—it has to be seen as such: as an elusive thing. Only after this is it is possible for a *puthujjana* to see that the order of things imposed by the presence of an assumed 'extra-temporal' phenomena in his experience is the *wrong order*. Based on things' appearance, and based on the sense of the experience as a whole, there is no justifiable reason for him to assume any primacy of the sense of unchangeability any longer. *There is* 'the sense of unchangeability' and that too *appears*. Thus, the unchanging '(sense of) being' was, in a wholly gratuitous manner, given priority over the appearance of things by being assumed as something which does not appear. The reason for this was simply because this notion of priority was never *noticed*. [62] If a *puthujjana* sees this *existing* notion that *appears*, (which is *that*, which is his 'Self'), a sight of inseparability between 'existence' and 'appearance' will emerge. If a thing exists, that is because it appears; if it appears, that is it exists. Neither the appearance nor existence can be discerned or conceived without each other, and that is what is meant by "to be is to be perceived"—*esse est percipi*. At this phase, the assumption of a hidden reality *behind* the appearance is almost inconceivable. The *puthujjana* understands that if anything is to exist, it *has to* appear.[63]

Thus, one's authenticity grows. The attitude has undergone a considerable change, from a *puthujjana* not even being aware of his own existence, over the notion that things appear *because* they exist, up to now, where 'to appear' and 'to exist' means just the same. Although this is certainly far better than anything before, nevertheless this attitude doesn't quite yet free the *puthujjana* from suffering. He has to continue, but this is as far as he can go on his own. No matter how hard he tries to understand the existence, any attempt to do so will throw him onto the appearance, and *vice versa*—whenever he looks at the appearance all he is going to see is the existence. In one way or another, the *puthujjana* will not be able to prevent himself from falling into a view that 'appearance' and 'existence' are the *same*,[64] or—since the difference is perceived between them—he might think that they are *different*.[65] But then the 'sameness' is still there, so perhaps they are *both-the-same-and-different*. Consequently, he can negate the whole thing and think that they are *neither-the-same-nor-different*. In either case, he remains *ignorant* in regard to the two; he remains a *puthujjana*. If he is to change this, he needs help from the *outside*; it has to come to him *externally*. The *puthujjana* is not able (i.e. it is structurally impossible) to "step out" of his experience, and see his situation of 'being-a-*puthujjana*' as a whole. No matter how far he steps back, he carries his ignorance with him. Only coming across the Buddha's Teaching can offer him an *outside perspective* of himself, which if cultivated can 'turn him' into a non-*puthujjana*.[66]

The Teaching tells him that 'existence' cannot be conceived anywhere *apart from* 'appearance', but also that it is *not* 'appearance' as such; furthermore, and even more importantly, it also tells him that 'existence' does not

[62] Hence the nature of it also appearing was obscured.

[63] Sartre (op. cit. , p. 6) seems to have become aware of this, but then chose to disagree: "What determines the being of the appearance is the fact that it appears. And since we have restricted reality to the phenomenon, we can say of the phenomenon that it is as it appears. Why not push the idea to its limit and say that the being of the appearance is its appearing? This is simply a way of choosing new words to clothe the old"Esse est percipi"of Berkeley… It seems that the famous formula of Berkeley cannot satisfy us—for two essential reasons, one concerning the nature of percipi, the other that of the percipere." Sartre then goes on to construe consciousness into a form of an 'empty' absolute which is "pure 'appearance' in the sense that it exists only to the degree to which appears." (op. cit., p. 12). There is no question of things existing to the degree they appear, however there is no such thing as 'pure appearance' in the sense of appearance independent of that which has appeared, since every appearance has to be appearance of something. Even if someone says: "Pure appearance"—that designation of that "pure appearance" is that which stands for that which is "pure appearance", thus that "pure appearance" is not pure—Sartre's "empty absolute" is thus contradictio in terminis.

[64] "The first being which we meet in our ontological inquiry is the being of the appearance. Is it itself an appearance?… In other words, is the being which discloses itself to me, which appears to me, of the same nature as the being of existents which appear to me?"—Sartre, op. cit. p. 4.

[65] "…the being of the phenomenon can not be reduced to the phenomenon of being."—Sartre, op. cit. p. 6.

[66] "The puthujjana's experience is (saṅkhāra-)dukkha from top to bottom, and the consequence is that he has no way of knowing dukkha for himself; for however much he 'steps back' from himself in a reflexive effort he still takes dukkha with him…""—CtP, p. 482; and on the p. 38 of the same work:"The Dhamma gives the puthujjana the outside view of avijjā, which is inherently unobtainable for him by unaided reflexion (in the ariyasāvaka this view has, as it were, 'taken' like a graft, and is perpetually available."

depend on 'appearance' directly, it depends on the 'assumption' (*upādāna*)[67] *in regard to* that which appears,[68] and this means nothing else then that the appearance, for its appearing, *does not require* existence at all—it is actually better *without it*.[69]

*Na kho, āvuso visākha, taññeva upādānaṃ te pañcupādānakkhandhā, nāpi aññatra pañcahupādānakkhandhehi upādānaṃ. Yo kho, āvuso visākha, pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu chandarāgo taṃ tattha upādānan"ti*

"The five assumed aggregates, friend Visākha, are not just assuming; but neither is there assumption apart from the five assumed aggregates. That, friend Visākha, in the five assumed aggregates which is desire-&-lust, that assumption is therein." (MN 44/i,299-300)

Thus this inquiry has passed 'through' the *puthujjana*'s 'being', which must not be either denied (dismissed) or justified (explained), but established as a *phenomenon*. It was seen that this phenomenon, far from being a reason because of which things appear, actually depends on the *puthujjana's assumption* in regard to *that which appears*. In the beginning, the *puthujjana*'s existence was a mere fact, of which he was barely aware and this fact represented his thoroughly inauthentic Self. However, now his existence has not only 'appeared' for him, it was seen that 'existence' cannot even be conceived *without* that which appears. In this way the roles were slowly reversed and the priority of existence over the appearance of things has faded. Now, with the Buddha's aid, a *puthujjana* can further see that actually the existence is not that which appears—it never was. It is the appearance that *exists*, by him *assuming* it (or by being *ignorant* in regard to it.) The existence, in order to be, requires *maintaining* (hence *upādānapaccāya bhavo*). In this way a new perspective has emerged on the relationship between existence and appearance, which reveals that, initially, the *puthujjana* had the whole picture upside-down. The further pursuit of this principle would simply carry further right through the center of *puthujjana*'s being (who at that point would cease to be a *puthujjana*) and complete the 'reversal' of this inverted experience of his, in the same manner as one would turn a sleeve inside-out. At that point that *individual*'s Being would cease without remainder.

by Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

## Papañca-Saññā-Sankhā

This compound has represented, to paraphrase John D. Ireland from his Udāna translation notes, a stumbling block which even the ancient commentaries find difficult to define. If the importance of the term is to be deduced from the extent of its difficulty then indeed understanding of this compound carries a lot of significance in regard to grasping of the Buddha's Teaching.

There are various translations of *papañca-saññā-sankhā*, with currently the most prominent ones being either Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's "notions [born of] mental proliferations" translating the term *papañca* as 'proliferation'; or Ven. Ñāṇamoli Thera's "calculations of perceptions of diversifications" where he renders papañca as 'diversification'. Beyond these two, plus the PTS Dictionary definition, I am not familiar in detail with

[67] Upādāna is defined by the PTS Pali-English Dictionary as follows: 1) lit. substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive or going; fuel, supply, provision… 2) 'drawing upon', grasping, taking up…; Assumption, assuming according to Chambers Concise Dictionary means: to adopt, to take in, to take upon oneself, to take for granted; [Latin term is assūměre, assumptum: (ad) to (sūměre) take]. The nature of the assumption in general, can be described as follows: the assumption takes its object for granted, and it does so without having a knowledge of whether that thing which is being 'taken up' actually is in the way that it is taken up. As a matter of fact, not having a knowledge of this is the fundamental prerequisite for the assumption to manifest, because if the object is known for what it is, there wouldn't be a need to assume it for what it is. Knowledge and assumption (vijjā and upādāna) are mutually exclusive. However, upādāna is there (as pañc'upādānakkhandā) which means that the assumption of what the five aggregates are, preceeds that which five aggregates are. In this way the beginingless avijjā puts the assumption first, as something "in front", something more fundamental, that the five aggregates which are taken up. This is done in direct violation of the fact that upādāna cannot be anywhere apart from the five aggregates, that it actually requires them for its existence. Thus, assumption assumes priority over that which is already there. That 'assumed assumption' (or taking for granted that which is taken for granted) becomes the puthujjana's 'norm' of things' existence, it 'measures' them according what it thinks they are, not for what they are. The extent of the assumption determines the extent of this measure (i. e. the existence)— upādānapaccāya bhavo. (Cf. Sartre, op. cit., p. 2: "…then the appearance becomes full positivity; its essence is an 'appearing' which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it.")

[68] He assumes: "It is the same; it is different; it is both-the-same-and-different; it is neither-the-same-nor-different."

[69] "Craving, however, is a gratuitous (though beginningless) parasite on the intentional structure described here, and its necessity is not to be deduced from the necessity of intention in all experience. Intention does not imply craving—a hard thing to understand!"—NoD, CETANĀ.

any other different interpretations of this compound. I am aware that Ven. Ñāṇananda in his "Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought" addresses this topic to a certain degree and also that Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi based his views of the term upon this interpretation[70] but I, myself, have never actually read Ven. Ñāṇananda's book so my view on this matter will come from perhaps, to some extent, a different angle.

To start with, the respective terms 'diversification' and 'proliferation' do not deviate from the meaning of *papañca*. According to the PTS dictionary, *papañca* is "expansion, diffuseness, manifoldedness" or "obstacle, hindrance or delay". The other members of the compound are defined as *saññā* (perception) and *sankhā* (sign or characteristic). So the above-mentioned translations would, to some degree, convey the nature of *papañca-saññā-sankhā* quite accurately and, as Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi says in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*[71] (endnote no. 229, p. 1204-5), "no rendering [of this compound] is utterly beyond doubt". The question which raises itself then is not how to etymologically trace the exact roots and origination of the compound, since such, a task in this case proves impossible in the absolute sense (and many seem to agree with this). Rather, it is better to focus and try to find out *within* one's own experience and practice what is implied existentially and phenomenologically in the Suttas by this term.

At the risk of being incomprehensible on some points, I would try to use 'descriptive' language, rather than overly technical terms as people's general views are already quite firm in regard to such terminology and it is very likely that they will be coming from a quite different place than me, probably *too* different which could obstruct them from understanding what I'm trying to say. In order to reduce this possibility to a minimum I thought of using some more common terms in my descriptions which carry less chance of being misunderstood. I hope I won't miss the mark too much.

Those familiar with phenomenology and the philosophy of existence should not have any problems in understanding a statement like all our experience is intentional or teleological or simply—significant. Each thing (*dhamma*) which is being experienced in our everyday life has, as its *inherent nature*, to point to other thing(s), within the experience as a whole. The thing's significance is not something 'steady' or 'inchangeable', although it often might appear so. The significance of a thing is, rather, something which is being *acquired* through the *repetition* of the respective experiences of that very thing. During this, the whole perception of a thing comes to 'grow' in a course of time, so to speak, and though there are certainly significances which are *recognized* as common to all people, at a more fundamental level they are all *individually* acquired and carried by each of us[72].

Without going into greater details let us say that in the Suttas this intentionality of experience is what is meant by the statement "with the grain" or *anuloma*. Actually, it is probably better to be more precise and to re-qualify this and say: taking for granted this intentionality, holding it and appropriating it, makes this *with* of "with the grain" to appear. In the *arahant*'s case, the ignorance is completely destroyed, yet the grain still remains, i.e. things *do not* stop pointing to other things, but this 'with' ceases to exist and is being replaced by 'against' as a result of which we get "against the grain"—*patiloma*. What has changed is the fundamental *direction* of regarding this very *directionality of experience.* Thus, even in the case of complete liberation things continue to be teleological or 'with purpose' so they still point to other things and so on. All this is being mentioned for the reason that the term *papañca* is probably too often misunderstood to simply mean 'mental proliferation', 'when one thinks or analyzes too much' or something like that. Although these things do imply *papañca* (or to be more precise ignorance and desire-and-lust), the above said nevertheless shows us that if *papañca* is anything, it is certainly more fundamental than that. In support of this we may add that *papañca* is frequently linked with *mañña̅nā*, 'conceving' (for which see Mūlapariyāya Sutta, MN 1) which certainly represents the most fundamental 'occurrence' in a mind affected with ignorance. Thus, what *papañca* would imply is nothing less than this very *intentionality* of our experience and its *tendency* to grow and expand. However this can happen only when that 'with' is present i.e. when the mind is not free from the bonds of ignorance and when it keeps following things in their appearance— "…his consciousness flows after the sign of form [sound, smell, tastes, touches, thoughts], is tied and shackled by gratification in the sign of form, if fettered by the fetter of gratification…"[73]. And surely enough it is said that the *arahant*

[70]Which, as I will attempt to show in this essay, is over-simplified.

[71]Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Third edition 2005.

[72]Preferences and values being perhaps too coarse yet a good enough example of this.

[73]Uddhesavibhanga Sutta, MN 138. [iii,225]

is *nippapañca*—without diversifications, free from any attachments (*upadhi*), free from burden *accumulated* in the past.

Thus, one's world (everything which appears—*nāma-rūpa*), expands. One's views, desires etc. expand too, yet this should not be understood in a momentary sense, which would suggest that they will somehow 'shrink' afterwards[74] by themselves. Their *intensity* or the *intensity of their presence*, once 'accumulated' i.e. came to being, is being 'assumed' or 'held' (*upādāna*) at that (new) face value. When this happens—and it happens through the repetition of [ignorant] actions as said above—consciousness "becomes established" upon that *degree of presence*, which then becomes the *actual experience* of that *thing*. Thus, the intensity of experience, that which appears as *nāma-rūpa* grows (for more details see Mahānidāna Sutta, DN 15 [ii,63]). This kind of pattern stretches from the most fundamental levels of our existence (as seen in Mūlapariyāya Sutta), up to the coarsest ones which we might say are, "resorting to rods and weapons, of quarrels, brawls, disputes, recrimination, malicious words and false speech[75]…", that is *the directly painful actions resulting from one's ignorance*. Thus, based on the above, *papañca* represents the 'diffusion' of this fundamental underlying principle with ignorance being *necessarily present*, and consequently *papañca-saññā-sankhā* are all 'calculations' or 'notions', perceived and originated as a result of taking this principle of diffusion for granted i.e. not understanding it.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that this whole situation would be much clearer if we can bear in mind Ven. Ñāṇavīra Thera's description of the infinite hierarchy of consciousness, the different levels of generality of *nāma-rūpa—viññāṇa*. That is because *papañca-saññā-sankhā* is not something which appears on a voluntary level, as if one could stop it at any time; it stretches from the most general (reflexive) levels of existence[76]. What one is responsible for, in that whole structure, is "delighting in, welcoming and holding to…" the "source through which perceptions and notions [born of] mental proliferation beset a man…"[77]. Thus the hierarchy of signifying things continues to arise (cease and change-while-standing) but it no longer grows; it is "cut off at the root, made like a palm stump". Its root was ignorance in itself and with its absence everything founded upon it comes to an end—one is free. In other words the respective experiences of the *puthujjana* and *arahant* alike, share the same fundamental nature of impermanence (arising and ceasing) but the respective *intensities* of those experiences are changed; for the *arahant feeling none* of it[78] and for the *puthujjana* dependant on the amount of ignorance being present. More ignorance, more 'intensity', things appear as more 'pressing' and one is easily prone to giving in to desire-and-lust. The arising of things in the *puthujjana*'s mind brings diffusion of perceptions and notions which, while not understood at its roots, will in return diffuse further and further and so on. This cannot happen in the *arahant*'s mind any more. His consciousness has 'ceased' so there is nothing to follow and diversify upon this teleological characteristic of the existential structure, which will remain only until his aggregates 'break apart'.

by Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

## The Infinity of The Mind (Notes on AN 1.51)

*Pabhassaramidaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ. Tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham. Taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti. Tasmā 'assutavato puthujjanassa cittabhāvanā natthī'ti vadāmī"ti.*

"Bright, monks, is the mind. It is superimposed by the defiling obstructions. The uninstructed worldling does not know this. For the uninstructed worldling, therefore, there is no development of mind."

*Pabhassaram*—this could be translated as 'bright', and it should be regarded as something lit up, shining, effulgent or *lucid*. To find out how this term should be understood, one can bring to mind the term *ākāsa*—space—which literally means 'shining forth', in the sense of a space which is lit up. In MN 49, we can see

[74] They would only do so in the arahant's case.

[75] Madhupiṇḍika Sutta, MN 18; translation taken from The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Third edition 2005, p. 202 [i,109].

[76] Compare also the nature of the five hindrances. It takes the first jhāna for one to be able to suppress them, which speaks for itself, since such strength of one's concentration is enough for becoming an arahant (if there is wisdom, of course).

[77] op. cit. p. 202.

[78] Compare Ven. Sāriputta's answer to Ven. Udāyi when the later asked him what is there that is pleasant when there is nothing felt [in nibbāna]—"Just this is pleasant, friend, that herein there is nothing felt", AN iv,414.

that consciousness is referred to as *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ,* where 'non-indicative', 'infinite' (or endless, limitless) and 'completely radiant' (i.e. utterly and fundamentally lucid, not to be understood in a sense of mystically beaming rays of light or similar), are the terms referring to *viññāṇa*.[79] The whole point is that 'brightness' is an epithet describing the inherently *infinite structure* of the mind, which is 'defiled' by the obstructions (i.e. made *finite*). In SN 35.202 the Buddha said:

How, friends, does one not leak? Here, friends, having seen form with eye, a monk does not incline towards pleasing forms, he is not affected by displeasing forms. He lives aware of the body there and with mind that is boundless.

A monk can dwell and live his life with a "boundless mind".[80] [81] He has understood the nature of the body *there* together with the arisen structure of the present experience,[82] which is infinite. By understanding the infinite or boundless, any boundaries and finiteness that were present as a result of that lack of understanding, are removed. In other words, the 'brightness' or 'lucidity' or 'infinity' or 'boundlessness' are the ways of describing the *property* of the fundamental structure of experience, which is the very reason why overcoming the obstructions is possible.

*Āgantuk*a—here it is translated as 'superimposed'. It can also mean adventitious, incidental, accessory. The main point that has to be borne in mind is that the 'obstructions' are "incidental", in the sense that they are not caused by the *pabhassaramidaṃ cittaṃ,* but are nevertheless there. The defiling obstructions do not have anything in common with the brightness of the mind; they are simply "layered" there, superimposed without actually affecting the infinite structure. Thus, since the infinite mind does not need those obstructions, it can be rightly said that they are completely gratuitous.[83]

So, obstructions, or more precisely *avijjā*, have no *first point* when they are manifested before which mind was pure, bright and unpolluted. Because of this it is not correct to refer to 'bright mind' as an *original thing*, as if it existed in a pure state *before* the obstructions arrived. Since there is no beginning to the infinity, nor to the beginningless *avijjā*, the notions of "first this, then that" have no place to apply. So how shall this evident priority of the 'bright mind' be understood then? The answer is straight—in an atemporal, structural sense. The infinity of the mind precedes *avijjā* ontologically, so to speak, while they are there both, *simultaneously present*. This should also shed some light onto why the structure of the mind does not imply nor require the obstructions (hence they are called 'obstructions')—they are superfluous, unnecessary, superimposed. Yet, the *uppakilesā* are there, and are not to be found elsewhere.[84] To put this all in different words: the infinity of one's mind is atemporally more fundamental than one's own nescience in regard to it. Furthermore, it is because of the nescience in regard to the *nature of infinity*, that *avijjā* is *a beginningless phenomenon*. If infinity has no beginning, how could the fundamental ignorance of that be different?

This is not all, there are further implications of one's ignorance of the infinite structure—namely, *permanence*. The uninstructed worldling confuses the notion of infinity (no beginning, no end) with the notion of *eternity*, or rather *identifies* the two. In this way, a present experience is regarded as eternal or permanent. What a *puthujjana* does not see is that eternity implies infinity, but the infinity does not imply eternity.[85]

[79] Ñāṇavīra Thera took sabbatopabhaṃ to be sabbato-apahaṃ (from apahoti, a+pahoti), in which case this compound would be synonymous with anidassanaṃ, 'non-indicative' or 'not-producing'(Self). (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera—Clearing the Path (2010), 'Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda', footnote j, p.28). Whether he was right or wrong in reading it like this, it is clear here that either way the context is scarcely affected—the infinity of consciousness does not indicate Self, does not produce Self, and it is fundamentally lucid, radiant, and unobstructed.

[80] Cf. MN 38.

[81] This also indicates that the states of 'boundlessness', 'infinity' and similar that are mentioned in the Suttas are not exclusively reserved for "meditation attainments", as they are commonly regarded.

[82] Cf. "There is just this body and name-and-form externally…"—SN 12.19.

[83] "Craving, however, is a gratuitous (though beginningless) parasite on the intentional structure described here, and its necessity is not to be deduced from the necessity of intention in all experience. Intention does not imply craving—a hard thing to understand! But if intention did imply craving, arahatta would be out of the question, and there would be no escape."—Ñāṇavīra Thera, op. cit., footnote f, p. 56.

[84] Cf. MN 44.

[85] The reader might notice that Ñāṇavīra Thera in 'Fundamental Structure' (op.cit. p. 107) refers to the endurance of a thing as 'eternal'. This structural 'eternity' is what is meant here by 'infinity'. It is just how one decides to designate these terms. If we were to choose the term 'eternal' to describe the property of the structure, we would additionally have to qualify it by saying: "A thing endures for ever. A thing is eternal… until it ceases." I, personally, prefer 'infinite' so that the distinction between the inherent nature

Because of the nescience in regard to this, the *puthujjana's* experience of infinity *assumes* permanence. In other words, his *citta* is regarded as permanent; he regards his Self as permanent. If one would be able to see the infinity without eternity, or even to see it as impermanent, the notion of Self, and everything else that depended upon it, (which required the notion of permanence), would cease without a remainder. Knowing infinity as something present (i.e. arisen) but impermanent (for the very reason that it has *arisen* on its own accord), clears the mind of any obstructions, any superimposed interferences with the infinite structure. Hence it is said that the *arahant's* mind is *immeasurable*.[86] His *citta* has been developed to the structurally more fundamental state, and it is because this state was always *possible* (but not *actual*)[87] that transcending the obstructions was feasible. In other words, if one's mind was *inherently* ignorant—i.e. *avijjā* structurally preceded any experience—arahantship would not be possible. (See footnote [5] above).[88]

by Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

## Not Perceiving the Feeling (Notes on MN 43)

*Friend, feeling and perception and consciousness-these things are associated, not disassociated. It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference [between them]. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one cognizes. Therefore, these things are associated not disassociated. It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference[between them].-MN 43.*

The Teaching is for the one who feels. When one thinks "this is what I feel", that is what one *thinks*, not what one *feels*. Feeling cannot be thought, it cannot be perceived. What one perceives is one's perception, what one feels is one's feeling.[89] Feeling and perception are simply *there*, superimposed, independent and different in nature.

**"What one feels, that one perceives."**

**Thinking that it is *the same* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [same] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.**

**Thinking that it is *a different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.**

**Thinking that it is *both-the-same-and-different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [both-the-same-and-different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.**

**Thinking that it is *neither-the-same-nor-different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [neither-the-same-nor-different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.**

**Thus, through that assumption, one *identifies* that thing.**

Whether one thinks it is the same, or different, or both or neither, feeling is there, *regardless* of the perception in regard to it. Thus, a feeling cannot be thought, it can only be *felt*. A perception cannot be felt, it can only be *perceived*. One has to learn *how to feel*, or how to *know* 'that because of which' the feeling is.[90] This means how to *discern* it from that which perception is. This cannot be done by separating feeling and perception and examining them individually.[91] So how can one do it then?-

**By *feeling* [the feeling]. By *perceiving* [the perception]. By *cognizing* [the cognizance].**

**By *cognizing feeling*-while-perceiving.**

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of the arisen experience (infinity) becomes apparent from the puthujjana's appropriation of it (eternity).

[86] Cf. AN 3.115 & SN 35.202.

[87] Cf. nibbānadhātu

[88] For these very reasons the Buddha was able to "rediscover" the path which lay there. For more cf. SN 12.65.

[89] Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Clearing the Path, SAÑÑĀ, §2.

[90] Or how to not-conceive 'that because of which' perception is.

[91] Thinking it in isolation from the present experience (i.e. from perception and consciousness) would amount to this. Since the separation cannot actually occur (not even in one's imagination), all one can do is assume that which is different between those three.

**By *understanding* cognizing.**

**By *not-conceiving* perception.**

If the superimposition of these two completely independent simultaneously present domains is understood, the assumption of *an independent thing*,[92] outside of feeling and perception ceases to be "a bridge" for the two. The 'thing' which is being *identified* (as the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different), is that "bridge" and feeling and perception 'meet' or 'come together' because of it. That thing is assumed *to be that* which one *feels* and *perceives*.[93] In this way, feeling and perception (and consciousness) also come to be *identified*.[94] Thus, that '[assumption of a] thing' which identifies the *unidentifiable* [95]feeling and perception makes them *manifest in* that *identity*-feeling and perception come to *exist*. The identity feels, the identity perceives-*I* feel, *I* perceive.

**One feels pleasure, one feels pain, one feels neither-pain-nor-pleasure.**

**One perceives blue, one perceives yellow, one perceives red, one perceives white.**[96]

One can be *aware* of what one feels; one can also be *aware* of what one perceives. *Through understanding that because of which one is aware of,* one *knows* the feeling and perception *structurally* cannot overlap or merge or "be bridged" or identified;[97] This makes the *assumption* in regard to feeling and perception (as the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different),[98] *redundant, irrelevant, not worth maintaining.* Why? Because it does not and it cannot make *any difference* to the *structural order* of things (feeling feels, perception perceives). If it could, the freedom from suffering would not be possible.[99] Fully understanding that whichever way one's thought (assumption) goes, the feeling cannot be *identified* as (the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different from) perception, leaves that feeling and that perception just standing there-*indifferent* to each other.[100] [101]

**Agreeable perception is assumed *to be that* which is pleasantly felt;**

**Disagreeable perception is assumed *to be that* which is unpleasantly felt;**

**Neutral perception is assumed *to be that* which is neutrally felt.**

Thus, one thinks it is *this sight* [102](sounds, smells…thoughts) *that is felt*. Because of that feeling one sets upon to 'affect' those sights (sounds, smells, …thoughts), sets upon to change them, modify them, adjust them, pursue them, avoid them; one gets *entangled* in the sights (sounds, smells…thoughts) *on account of what* one feels *when they are* . Knowing that feeling is *just there*-being felt, and perception is *just there*-being perceived, makes further entanglement *impossible*, and any entanglement that was there[103] is made redundant, disowned, dropped down, never to picked up again. Why? Because it was structurally impossible to get entangled in the first place, but until one has fully understood that, one's 'not-knowing-that-one-cannot-be-entangled' *was one's entanglement.* When one understands that the arisen things cannot structurally *relate* to each other-feeling feels the feeling, perception perceives the perception[104] –*concern* becomes impossible or *inconceivable-dukkha* completely ceases, never to arise again.

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[92]The [sense of] independence is the inevitable outcome of the presence of the assumption in one's experience. It is not therefore accidental that one's sense of Self is always regarded as an extra-temporal and changeless, i.e. independent (from the rest of the experience). Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, op.cit., ATTĀ, §1 and L.147, §3.

[93]Thus, because of this assumption, one feels the thing, not one's feelings; one perceives the thing, not one's perception. By doing so one conceives things different to what they are, and when those things change one suffers.

[94]Cf. my essay Determining Determinations. 'That because of which' [feeling, perception, consciousness are] is assumed as 'that which' feeling, perception, consciousness 'are'.

[95]"It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference…"-MN 43.

[96]Cf. MN 43.

[97]Or cross into each other's domains.

[98]All of these are forms of identity.

[99]Cf. my essay The Infinity of Mind.

[100]y understanding this structural 'indifference', one feels indifferent to the whole structure-which is what upekkhā is.

[101]It is the nature of the superimposition that breeds this indifference, since concern is in its nature always in relation to something.

[102]Disagreeable (or agreeable, or neutral)

[103]In the past, or possible in the future, or standing there in the present.

[104]Matter matters, feeling feels, perception perceives, determinations determine, consciousness cognizes.

## Resistance and Designation (Notes on DN 15)

*Nāmarūpapaccayā phasso'ti iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ, tadānanda, imināpetaṃ pariyāyena veditabbaṃ, yathā nāmarūpapaccayā phasso. Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi nāmakā-yassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu asati api nu kho rūpakāye adhivacanasamphasso paññāyethā ti?*

*No hetaṃ, bhante.*

*Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi rūpakāyassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho nāmakāye paṭighasamphasso paññāyethā ti?*

*No hetaṃ, bhante.*

*Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi nāmakāyassa ca rūpakāyassa ca paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho adhivacanasamphasso vā paṭighasamphasso vā paññāyethā ti?*

*No hetaṃ, bhante.*

*Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi nāma-rūpassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho phasso paññā-yethā ti?*

*No hetaṃ, bhante.*

*Tasmātihānanda, eseva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo phassassa, yadidaṃ nāmarūpaṃ.*

" 'With name-&-matter as condition, contact', so it was said: how it is, Ānanda, that with name-&-matter as condition there is contact should be seen in this manner. Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the name-body is described,—they being absent, would designation-contact be manifest in the matter-body?

-No indeed, lord.

-Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the matter-body is described,—they being absent, would resistance-contact be manifest in the name-body?

-No indeed, lord.

-Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the name-body and the matter-body are described,—they being absent, would either designation-contact or resistance-contact be manifest?

-No indeed, lord.

-Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which name-&-matter is described,—they being absent, would contact be manifest?

-No indeed, lord.

-Therefore, Ānanda, just this is the reason, this is the occasion, this is the arising, this is the condition of contact, that is to say name-&-matter."

1. 'Matter' is required for 'name' to be present. If there would not be that which is 'named', 'name' would not be able to arise. If on the other hand, 'name' is absent, 'matter' would simply be inconceivable. Thus, there is no 'name' without 'matter' and there is no 'matter' without 'name', hence-*name-&-matter*. In this way 'name' *designates* the resistance, and 'matter' *resists* the designation. Without 'name'(-body), there would not be any designation manifested in 'matter'(-body), but without 'matter'(-body), there would not be any resistance manifested in the 'name'(-body). It is these respective *manifestations* of 'designation' and 'resistance' that are *puthujjana's* problem.

2. With name-&-matter, he *assumes* that it is *this* 'matter' that is *designated.* Through that *assumption,* designation *manifests* in that matter body[105]. In this way one's 'matter' is *designated*-one is *contacted*.

[105] upādānapaccayā bhavo.

With name-&-matter, he *assumes* that it is *this* 'name' that is *resisted.* Through that *assumption,* resistance *manifests* in that name-body. In this way one's 'name' is *resisted*-one is *contacted*.

**He assumes that it is *this* 'matter' that is designated.**

**He assumes it is the *same* 'matter' that is designated and is the condition for 'name'; he assumes it is a *different* 'matter' that is designated and is the condition for 'name'; He assumes it is *both-same-&-different* matter that is designated and is the condition for 'name'; He assumes it is *neither-same-nor-different* 'matter' that is designated and is the condition for 'name'. Either way-the assumption is *there.***

**That which resists him he designates as the same, different, both-same-&-different, or neither same-nor-different, as that because of which 'name' is there. The designation *manifests* in this 'matter'.**[106]

**Thus, he designates (*contacts*) his resistance. Contact is there.**

**He assumes that it is *this* 'name' that is resisted.**

**He assumes it is the *same* 'name' that is resisted and is the condition for 'matter'; He assumes it is a *different* 'name' that is resisted and is the condition for 'matter'; He assumes it is *both-same-&-different* 'name' that is resisted and is the condition for 'matter'; He assumes it is *neither-same-nor-different* 'name' that is resisted and is the condition for 'matter'; Either way-the assumption is *there.***

**That which is designated he resists as the same, different, both-same-&-different, or neither same-nor-different, as that because of which 'matter' is there. The resistance *manifests* in this 'name'.**[107]

**Thus, he resists (*contacts*) his designation. Contact is there.**

3. *Cf. Mūḷapariyāya Sutta*, MN 1:

*Pathaviṃ pathavito sañjānāti; pathaviṃ pathavito saññatvā pathaviṃ maññati, pathaviyā maññati, pathavito maññati, pathaviṃ meti maññati, pathaviṃ abhinandati. taṃ kissa hetu? 'apariññātaṃ tassā'ti vadāmi.*

"From earth, he has a percept of earth; having had from earth a percept, he conceives [that to be] earth, he conceives [that to be] in earth, he conceives [that to be] out of earth, he conceives earth as 'mine', he delights earth. Why is that? He has not fully understood it, I say…"

What a *puthujjana* has to realise is that regardless of *what* he perceives, it is always his *perception* that is perceived. Whether it is 'earth', 'water', 'fire', 'air' or any other thing that MN 1 mentions, all one will ever perceive (*puthujjana* and *arahant* alike) is one's own perception of that 'matter'.[108] This is saying nothing else than 'matter' is and will *always be outside* of one's reach, outside of that which has appeared.[109] Perception is that which is perceived, but perception would not be possible if there is no matter to be perceived; on the other hand matter would be *inconceivable* if perception was indiscernible. If one thinks "it is because of the matter, that perception is there", *that* thought is *perceived*, which means that *that* which is 'matter' *in that thought* is also perceived. But since it is only perception that can be perceived, that 'matter' which is perceived in that thought, cannot be that 'matter' which cannot be perceived, since it is perceived. In this way, *from* 'matter', a *puthujjana* has a percept of 'matter', which he *conceives* to be that *same* 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *different* 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *both-same &-different* 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *neither-same-nor-different* 'matter' because of which there is a percept of

[106]'Name' assumes existence in 'matter'-'name' exists.

[107]'Matter' finds footing in 'name'-'matter' exists.Cf. DN 11.

[108]"It would be as wrong to say 'a feeling is perceived' as it would 'a percept is felt' (which mix up saññā and vedanā); but it is quite in order to say 'a feeling, a percept, (that is, a felt thing, a perceived thing) is cognized', which simply means that a feeling or a percept is present (as, indeed, they both are in all experience—see Majjhima v,3 (M.i,293)). Strictly speaking, then, what is cognized is nāmarūpa, whereas what is perceived (or felt) is saññā (or vedanā), i.e. only nāma. This distinction can be shown grammatically. Vijānāti, to cognize, is active voice in sense (taking an objective accusative): consciousness cognizes a phenomenon (nāmarūpa); consciousness is always consciousness of something. Sañjānāti, to perceive, (or vediyati, to feel) is middle voice in sense (taking a cognate accusative): perception perceives [a percept] (or feeling feels [a feeling]). Thus we should say 'a blue thing (= a blueness), a painful thing (= a pain), is cognized', but 'blue is perceived' and 'pain is felt'. (In the Suttas generally, due allowance is to be made for the elasticity in the common usage of words. But in certain passages, and also in one's finer thinking, stricter definition may be required.)"-Ñāṇavīra Thera, Clearing the Path, 2010, p. 92.

[109]Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Seeking The Path, 2010, p. 40, §§17-18: "[Four mahābhutā]…will always be just below our feet."

matter. Either way 'matter' is *conceived*. He becomes responsible for the *manifestation* of the conceiving of that 'matter', he "makes" that 'matter' *exist*.[110] That "creation" is *his*-thus it is '*my*' 'matter'.[111] But, since that 'my matter' is conceived as that 'matter' *because of which* there is a percept of matter, then that percept[ion] too becomes '*my perception*'.[112] The same goes for one's feelings and intentions. They are all conceived as *mine*. Since the *puthujjana's* whole experience is *his*, he thinks he *himself is*-the view of Self exists.[113]

4. When consciousness does not indicate any 'me' or 'mine', that 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter, does not manifest itself in that perception (or feeling, or intention)-it does not manifest itself in 'name'. Thus, in perception there is only perception, i.e. in the seen there is only that which is seen, namely-the seen (and so on for all the senses).[114] One ceases to "perceive 'matter"'; one *knows*[115] such a thing is impossible or *inconceivable*,[116] one simply *understands*[117]: *there is* matter, *there is* perception (or feeling, or intention), *there is* (non-indicative) consciousness. One *understands*-there are five"heaps".[118] Since one understands them, one ceases to *assume* them. With the cessation of assumption, *that* which they were *assumed to be*, ceases-*bhava* comes to an end.

by Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

## Determining Determinations

1. Feeling, perception and consciousness are always there together.[119] It is impossible to have them arising independently and on their own; when there is one, the other two are present as well. They do not pass into each other's domain[120]: one feels one's feeling, one perceives one's perception, one cognizes one's cognizance. Assuming that it is the same thing that one feels, perceives and cognizes, or assuming that it is a different thing that one feels, perceives, and cognizes, or both-the-same-&-different thing that one feels, perceives, and cognizes, or neither-the-same-nor-different thing that one feels, perceives, and cognizes, means that *assumed thing* is *there*-it *exists*. One *conceives it* through one's feeling, one's perception, and one's cognizance. One conceives that thing because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, *as that thing* because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there. But since all one can ever feel is one's feeling; all one can ever perceive is one's perception; all one can ever cognize is one's cognizance-*that thing* which is conceived *as that because of* which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, will *have to be* either *a feeling*, *a perception* or *a cognizance*, and as such *cannot be that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there.[121] By conceiving a feeling, or a perception, or a cognizance *as that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there, one *assumes* that feeling, or perception, or cognizance, *existing independently* of feeling, perception and cognizance, *as that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there. Thus, *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance *are* there, *manifests in that* feeling, perception or cognizance which are *assumed to be that because of which* feeling, perception and

[110] Thus, 'matter' can never be perceived, but it can "find footing" in that which is perceived (or felt, or intended).

[111] He delights in his own creation, because it is his own creation.

[112] If one is not to conceive that 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter, one would not conceive oneself as that because of which there is a perceiver and conceiver of the world. Cf. SN 35.116: The eye… ear… nose… tongue… body… mind… is that in the world by which one is a perceiver and conceiver of the world. Also, cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, op.cit. p. 298: And when shall we 'not be that by which'? … the Buddha tells us: it is when, for us, in the seen there shall be just the seen, and so with the heard, the sensed, and the cognized. And when in the seen is there just the seen? When the seen is no longer seen as 'mine' (etaṃ mama) or as 'I' (eso'ham asmi) or as 'my self' (eso me attā): in brief, when there is no longer, in connexion with the senses, the conceit 'I am', by which 'I am a conceiver of the world'.

[113] That's how the sense of the 'mine' leads to the sense of 'Self'.

[114] Cf. Bāhiya Sutta, Ud. 10/8.

[115] "Wisdom is to be developed…"-MN 43.

[116] If it were fundamentally subject to one's conceivings, freedom from conceivings would not be possible. Cf. my Notes on AN 1.51.

[117] "…consciousness is to be understood".-MN 43.

[118] Simultaneous, superimposed, utterly indifferent to each other.

[119] Cf. MN 43.

[120] Cf. Notes on DN 15.

[121] Now is probably the time to mention that none of this, nor paragraphs to follow, can be grasped intellectually by the reader. Things that are described here are not to be made sense of in a rationally or philosophically satisfying way, but to be seen in a certain order that they arise in one's experience. Hence the deliberate repetitive style which aligns things in the order they are to be understood (which is also the reason why the Suttas are in that form). Also, refraining from a too particular and established terminology was intentional, since that would most likely lead a reader to assume that he already knows what those terms refer to.

cognizance are there. Thus, *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance *are* there, manifests in that being-it *exists*.

2. That because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, is that which is *a necessary condition* for feeling, perception and cognizance that are there, because *without it*, that feeling, perception and cognizance would *not be there*. As a necessary condition, that because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, is thus *that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined*. But since through the assumption, *that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined*, *manifests as* feeling, perception, or cognizance *because of which* that feeling, perception and cognizance are there, *that* feeling, perception and cognizance *are determined as that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance *are determined*.[122] Thus, through *not knowing* that one can only feel one's feelings, perceive one's perception, cognize one's cognizance,[123] one *determines that by which* one's feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined, as* a feeling, a perception or a cognizance. Through that lack of knowledge, determinations are manifested-*avijjāpaccayā saṅkārā.*

3. One determines one's determinations through assuming that because of which determinations are there.

But that because of which determinations are there cannot be that which is determined by those determinations, since all one can determine are one's determination, not *that because of which* those determinations are there. Since determinations cannot determine that because of which determinations are there, that because of which determinations are there is that which is non-determinable-it is *undetermined*. If that because of which the determinations are there was *to be* determined, then the escape from determinations would not be possible.[124]

One can know that that because of which determinations are there cannot be determined.

Without knowing *that knowing,* one's knowledge of that because of which determinations are there, *determines* that because of which determinations are there, *as that* because of which determinations are there.[125]

Since that because of which determinations are there *cannot fundamentally be determined,* one's knowledge that *determines* that because of which determinations are there, *leads to* 'assuming' *that* because of which determinations are there *as that* because of which determinations are there.

And since that assumption is then *there*, *that* which is determined as *that because of which* determinations are there, is *there too*, *as that assumed determination* because of which determinations are there-it is *manifested*, it *exists*.

**One can know that that because of which determinations are there cannot be determined.**

**By knowing *that knowing*,[126] one's knowledge of that because of which determinations are there, *does not determine* that because of which determinations are there,[127] *as that* because of which determinations are there.**

**Since that because of which determinations are there *cannot fundamentally be determined,*[128] one's knowledge that *does not determine* that because of which determinations are there *does not lead to***

[122] Cf. Khanda Saṃyutta viii,7.

[123] And not that because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there.

[124] "There is, monks, (a) non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined. If, monks, there were not that non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined, an escape from (the) born, become, made, determined would not be discernible. But, because there is (a) non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined escape from (the) born, become, made, determined is discernible."—Nibbāna Sutta, Ud. 8/3. *Cf. Notes on AN 1.51. Because* the structure of the experience *cannot* fundamentally be appropriated, freedom from the appropriation is possible.

[125] "From nibbāna, he has a percept of nibbāna; having known nibbāna from nibbāna, he conceives nibbāna, he conceives in nibbāna, he conceives out of nibbāna, he conceives 'My' nibbāna, he delights nibbāna. Why is that? He has not fully understood it, I say."—MN 1. Also cf. MN 102, [237].

[126] One knows that whether one intends toward, away, both or neither, in regard to that because of which intentions are there, that because of which intentions are there remains there, regardless of the intention in regard to it. By understanding that it is fundamentally inaccessible to one's intentions, one ceases to crave towards it with those intentions, one ceases to assume it through those intentions, since neither intentions nor that which directly stands upon them, namely-one's assumption-could access it. And one knows that. ['Ignorant intentions' are simply craving, which leads to 'assumption'-taṇhapaccayā upādāna. Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, op.cit., p.56, footnote f.: "Intention does not imply craving-a hard thing to understand!"].

[127] Does not "stand for it" in one's experience, does not "represent it", does not "manifest it".

[128] Cannot be 'accessed' by it.

**'assuming' *that* because of which determinations are there *as that* because of which determinations are there.**

**And since that assumption is then *not there,* that which is determined as that because of which determinations are there, is *not there either*, *as that assumed determination* because of which determinations are there-it is *not manifested,* it *does not exist.***[129] [130] [131]

by Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

# Ajahn Thaniyo

## Majjhima Nikāya 2 Sabbāsavasutta: All the Outflows

**Āsavas and the Furnace of Patient Edurance**
by Thaniyo Bhikkhu

**Etymology:Āsava** The word is formed from the combination of two parts:

- **ā-**: A prefix meaning "towards," "upon," or "all over."
- **-sava**: Derived from the Sanskrit root √**sru**, which means "to flow," "to trickle," or "to ooze."

**Literal Meanings:**

**A. The "Outflow" or "Leak"**
In this sense, *āsava* refers to something that leaks out of a container or into a vessel.

**B. The "Ferment" or "Ooze"**
In ancient India, *āsava* was the word for a spirituous liquor, a "ferment," or an "intoxicant" created by the long-standing discharge from trees or plants.

Thus have I heard—
One time the Buddha was dwelling at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's park. There the Buddha addressed the bhikkhus: "Bhikkhus."
"Venerable sir," the bhikkhus replied to the Buddha. The Buddha said this:

"I will teach you the explanation on the restraint of all outflows. Listen and pay close attention, I will speak."
"Yes, venerable sir," the bhikkhus replied to the Buddha. The Buddha said this:

"I state that the destruction of the outflows is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and does not see. And for one knowing and seeing what do I state the destruction of the outflows? Both yoniso manasikāra and ayoniso manasikāra. For one practicing ayoniso manasikāra, unarisen outflows arise and arisen outflows increase. But for one practicing yoniso manasikāra, unarisen outflows do not arise and arisen outflows are abandoned.

[129] The assumption is made redundant.

[130] If one thinks "there is that because of which intentions are there, which is inaccessible to those intentions", that thought 'stands for' that because of which intentions are there, and through that thought one assumes access to that inaccessible-inaccessible exists. If one knows that regardless of what a thought or intention stand for, it can never "step outside" of its nature-one can only think one's thoughts (perception perceived) or intend one's intentions, not that because of which that thought/intention are there-one ceases to assume that which that intention stands for, because of which intention is there. Thus, intention remains, while "attempts to access" fade away, since one sees them as pointless and loses interest in them. When those "attempts" are thoroughly subdued, 'the assumption' of that which was assumed "accessible" (through those very attempts) disappears too, never to return.

[131] The only reason why assumption can be made redundant, is because it was redundant in the first place. Not knowing that it was redundant, makes it necessary, until it ceases to be so. And the reason why assumption presents itself as necessary is because it assumes that which is necessary in one's experience, namely-the five aggregates. Thus, the five aggregates, which are necessary in one's experience, come to exist, through the assuming of them as that which is necessary in one's experience. But since they are necessary in one's experience, assuming them as necessary in one's experience is not necessary. But until one knows that, that assumption will exist.

There are outflows to be abandoned by seeing, outflows to be abandoned by restraint, outflows to be abandoned by using, outflows to be abandoned by bearing , outflows to be abandoned by avoidance, outflows to be abandoned by removal, and outflows to be abandoned by bhāvanā.

**1. Outflows to be Abandoned by Seeing**

What are the outflows to be abandoned by seeing? Here, an untaught ordinary person—who is not a seer of the Noble Ones, is unskilled in the Noble dhammā, and is undisciplined in the Noble dhammā; who is not a seer of good persons, is unskilled in the dhammā of good persons, and is undisciplined in the dhammā of good persons—does not understand which dhammā should be given manasikāra and which dhammā should not be given manasikāra. Not understanding this, he gives manasikāra to dhammā that should not be given manasikāra, and he does not give manasikāra to dhammā that should be given manasikāra.

What are the dhammā that should not be given manasikāra but to which he gives manasikāra? They are the dhammā that, when given manasikāra, cause the unarisen outflow of sensuality to arise or the arisen outflow of sensuality to increase; cause the unarisen outflow of being (bhava) to arise or the arisen outflow of being to increase; and cause the unarisen outflow of avijjā to arise or the arisen outflow of avijjā to increase.

What are the dhammā that should be given manasikāra but to which he does not give manasikāra? They are the dhammā that, when given manasikāra, cause the unarisen outflow of sensuality not to arise or the arisen outflow of sensuality to be abandoned; cause the unarisen outflow of being not to arise or the arisen outflow of being to be abandoned; and cause the unarisen outflow of avijjā not to arise or the arisen outflow of avijjā to be abandoned.

Because he gives manasikāra to dhammā that should not be given manasikāra and fails to give manasikāra to dhammā that should be given manasikāra, unarisen outflows arise in him and arisen outflows increase.

He practices ayoniso manasikāra in this way: 'Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Will I be in the future? Will I not be in the future? What will I be in the future? How will I be in the future? Having been what, what will I become in the future?' Or he is internally doubtful about the present time: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?'

When he practices ayoniso manasikāra in this way, one of six views arises in him. The view 'I have a self' arises in him as truth and reality; the view 'I have no self' arises in him as truth and reality; the view 'I perceive self by self' arises in him as truth and reality; the view 'I perceive non-self by self' arises in him as truth and reality; the view 'I perceive self by non-self' arises in him as truth and reality; or else he has the view: 'This self of mine that speaks and feels, and experiences the result of good and bad actions (kammas) here and there, this self is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change, and will remain exactly the same for eternity.'

This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not fully freed from birth, aging, death, sorrows, lamentations, dukkhas, mental displeasures, and despairs; I state that 'he is not fully freed from dukkha'.

But a well-taught ariyasāvako—who is a seer of the Noble Ones, is skilled in the Noble dhammā, and is well-disciplined in the Noble dhammā; who is a seer of good persons, is skilled in the dhammā of good persons, and is well-disciplined in the dhammā of good persons—understands which dhammā should be given manasikāra and which dhammā should not be given manasikāra. Understanding this, he does not give manasikāra to dhammā that should not be given manasikāra, and he gives manasikāra to dhammā that should be given manasikāra.

What are the dhammā that should not be given manasikāra and to which he does not give manasikāra? They are the dhammā that, when given manasikāra, cause the unarisen outflow of sensuality to arise or the arisen outflow of sensuality to increase; cause the unarisen outflow of being to arise or the arisen outflow of being to increase; and cause the unarisen outflow of avijjā to arise or the arisen outflow of avijjā to increase.

What are the dhammā that should be given manasikāra and to which he gives manasikāra? They are the

dhammā that, when given manasikāra, cause the unarisen outflow of sensuality not to arise or the arisen outflow of sensuality to be abandoned; cause the unarisen outflow of being not to arise or the arisen outflow of being to be abandoned; and cause the unarisen outflow of avijjā not to arise or the arisen outflow of avijjā to be abandoned.

Because he does not give manasikāra to dhammā that should not be given manasikāra and gives manasikāra to dhammā that should be given manasikāra, unarisen outflows do not arise in him and arisen outflows are abandoned.

He practices yoniso manasikāra in this way: 'This is dukkha'; he practices yoniso manasikāra: 'This is the origin of dukkha'; he practices yoniso manasikāra: 'This is the cessation of dukkha'; he practices yoniso manasikāra: 'This is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha'.

When he practices yoniso manasikāra in this way, three fetters are abandoned: identity view, doubt, and sīlabbataparāmāsa. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by seeing.

**2. Outflows to be Abandoned by Restraint**

What are the outflows to be abandoned by restraint? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu dwells restrained with the restraint of the eye faculty. If he were to dwell unrestrained with the restraint of the eye faculty, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he dwells restrained with the restraint of the eye faculty, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise.

By reflecting yoniso, he dwells restrained with the restraint of the ear faculty… the nose faculty… the tongue faculty… the physical body (kāya) faculty… the mano faculty. If he were to dwell unrestrained with the restraint of the mano faculty, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he dwells restrained with the restraint of the mano faculty, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise.

If he were to dwell completely unrestrained, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he dwells restrained, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by restraint.

**3. Outflows to be Abandoned by Using**

What are the outflows to be abandoned by using? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu uses the robe: 'Only to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off contact with flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things, and only for the purpose of covering the private parts.'

By reflecting yoniso, he uses almsfood: 'Not for amusement, not for intoxication, not for beautification, not for adornment, but only for the continuation and nourishment of this physical body, for keeping away harm, and for the support of the brahmacariya, thinking: 'Thus I will destroy the old feeling and will not arouse a new feeling, and I will maintain myself, be blameless, and dwell comfortably.'

By reflecting yoniso, he uses lodging: 'Only to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off contact with flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things, and only for the purpose of dispelling the dangers of weather and enjoying seclusion.'

By reflecting yoniso, he uses medicinal requisites for the sick: 'Only to ward off arisen sickness feelings, and for the highest benefit of freedom from affliction.'

[The Āgama parallel – MĀ 10 – elaborates the intentions for using requisites slightly differently: "If one uses clothing, it is not for the sake of material gain, pride, or adornment, but solely to ward off mosquitoes, gadflies, wind, rain, cold, and heat, and for the sake of shame and modesty. If one uses food and drink, it is not for gain, pride, or to become plump and attractive. It is solely to sustain the kāya for a long time, to remove afflictions and domanassa, to practice the brahmacariya, to ensure that old illnesses are severed and new illnesses do not arise, and to live long, securely, and free from disease. If one uses dwellings, rooms, beds, and bedding, it is not for gain, pride, or adornment, but solely to recover from fatigue and find a quiet place to sit. If one uses medical decoctions, it is not for gain, pride, or to become plump and attractive, but solely to eradicate the torments of illness, to sustain the life faculty, and to remain secure and free from disease."]

If he did not use these requisites with such "reflection", outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he uses them properly, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by using.

**4. Outflows to be Abandoned by Bearing**

What are the outflows to be abandoned by bearing ? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu is patient with cold, heat, hunger, and thirst. He becomes one of an enduring nature regarding contact with flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things; regarding ill-spoken and unwelcome ways of speech; and regarding arisen bodily feelings that are dukkha, sharp, severe, piercing, disagreeable, unpleasing, and life-taking.

[The **Āgama** parallel adds an entirely new section here on energetic bearing before listing physical hardships: "One exerts energy to abandon evil and unwholesome states and to cultivate wholesome dhammā, constantly maintaining the perception of striving. With a focused citta, they strive diligently. Even if the skin, flesh, sinews, bones, blood, and marrow of the kāya dry up, they do not abandon their energy until they have attained what they seek."] [The parallel also adds to the list of unpleasant experiences: "fleas, lice… abusive voices. Even if beaten with a stick, one can endure it."]

If he did not endure these things, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he endures them, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by bearing .

**5. Outflows to be Abandoned by Avoidance**

What are the outflows to be abandoned by avoidance? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu avoids a fierce elephant, a fierce horse, a fierce bull, a fierce dog, a snake, a stump, a thorny place, a chasm, a cliff, a cesspool, and a sewer. By reflecting yoniso, he avoids sitting in unsuitable seats, wandering in unsuitable resorts, and associating with bad friends, since wise fellow-followers of the brahmacariya would suspect him of bad conduct if he did so.

If he did not avoid these things, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he avoids them, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by avoidance.

**6. Outflows to be Abandoned by Removal**

What are the outflows to be abandoned by removal? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu does not consent to an arisen vitakka of sensuality; he abandons it, removes it, terminates it, and makes it non-existent. He does not consent to an arisen vitakka of ill-will… an arisen vitakka of harming… any continually arising bad, unwholesome dhammā; he abandons them, removes them, terminates them, and makes them non-existent.

If he did not remove these things, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he removes them, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by removal.

**7. Outflows to be Abandoned by Bhāvanā**

What are the outflows to be abandoned by bhāvanā? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu engages in the bhāvanā of the sati-enlightenment factor, supported by viveka, supported by dispassion, supported by cessation, culminating in relinquishment.

By reflecting yoniso, he engages in the bhāvanā of the investigation-of-dhammā-enlightenment factor… the effort-enlightenment factor… the joy-enlightenment factor… the calming-enlightenment factor… the samādhi-enlightenment factor… the upekkhā-enlightenment factor, supported by viveka, supported by dispassion, supported by cessation, culminating in relinquishment.

If he did not engage in their bhāvanā, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he engages in their bhāvanā, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by bhāvanā.

**Conclusion**

When, for a bhikkhu, the outflows to be abandoned by seeing are abandoned by seeing; the outflows to be abandoned by restraint are abandoned by restraint; the outflows to be abandoned by using are abandoned by using; the outflows to be abandoned by bearing are abandoned by bearing ; the outflows to be abandoned by avoidance are abandoned by avoidance; the outflows to be abandoned by removal are abandoned by removal; and the outflows to be abandoned by bhāvanā are abandoned by bhāvanā—this is called: 'A bhikkhu who dwells restrained with the restraint of all outflows. He has severed craving, turned away the fetter, and, rightly by the breakthrough of conceit, has made an end of dukkha.'"

This the Buddha said. Satisfied, those bhikkhus rejoiced in the Buddha's speech.

*"Patient endurance is the supreme austerity." – Dhammapada 184*

You are born into three underlying pressures outflowing from the citta and flooding experience: the urge towards sensual pleasures (kamāsava), the urge towards being (bhavāsava), and the urge towards denial and distraction (avijjāsava). These habitual, structural attitudes of the citta are not only states of agitation, but they also determine a severe narrowing of attention. The agitated citta focuses entirely on obtaining pleasure, blinding itself to the dangers of doing so. It operates from a self-centered position, demanding its own point of view be prioritized, and denies, unknowingly, any truths that undermine its sensual way of being. It enforces a way of seeing that is willfully blind to the greater context of your existential situation.

The strained citta's craving pressures you to seek relief in sense pleasures, demanding a moment of rest which comes only after much toil – a pleasure born entirely from exhaustion by being enslaved to an unexhausted craving. The citta seeks to control a world that is fundamentally uncontrollable. It pushes and obsesses over a persistent "self" narrative: "Who am I? How am I? Why am I? What was I? What will I be? How is this in relation to me?" It consistently leans toward whatever is immediately pleasant and generates a deep resistance to anything that reveals the nature of uncertainty – anicca. These modes of being keep you bound in an infinite struggle against the Nature of Things (Dhamma). This is fundamentally dukkha born of *trying* to escape dukkha, instead of no longer resisting it.

To counter these tendencies, you must see through the dukkha, the pressure, the craving, and the intentions that the citta habitually presents, and refuse to take them up. This is Yonisomanasikara – a context-knowing awareness that cuts through the habitual, narrowed attention of the citta. You execute this by forcing Right View upon the citta: the recognition that the root of the dukkha is craving and nothing else. Turn your attention directly to that background craving agitation and see its nature as suffering. This gives the citta the necessary space to understand and then relax that craving. This requires relentless remembering on your part to see through to what is important, because the citta will not do it for you. Right View must be forced upon the citta. It will resist.

Sense restraint is an essential component in this seemingly hostile takeover of the citta. You specifically must restrain yourself, because if you do not, the citta certainly will not. This restraint makes the workings of suffering clear by outlining the pressure of the senses, the craving, the dukkha, and the various conditions that make up experience. This observation goes a long way in undermining the citta's assumption of an unconditioned, independent self-identity. This dynamic will not be obvious if you are not looking for it, but what will be undeniable is the coolness of restraint. To extract wisdom from that peace, you must keep the greater context and purpose alive through active self-reflection. It will not just happen on its own.

There is plenty to reflect on, because every act has an intention behind it which is either wholesome or unwholesome, connected with the goal or not. By knowing its flavor, you avoid the unwholesome and undermine every act that allows the wild citta to grow wilder. Trace every action back to its root intention. Expose the motivation. You will find that the actions you love most directly fuel your suffering.

Many motivations that you were previously unaware of, or that you were aware of but chose to ignore, will be brought to light. This is difficult to face and accept. You will want to keep those background motivations covered up, because by uncovering them, you are forced to come to terms with the very habits that sustain your dukkha.

Patient endurance is the core practice here. It is the refusal to move when craving demands movement. It is the friction that creates the fire to burn defilements. This factor must be protected against the citta's agitation no matter what.

Restraint starves the defilements; patient endurance shines a light upon them, leading to their eventual extinguishment. The citta must be forced into clarity until the pressure of craving breaks.

*"Formerly this citta wandered about as it liked, where it wished and according to its pleasure, but now I shall thoroughly master it with wisdom, as a mahout controls an elephant in rut." – Dhammapada 326*

### Going Through Dukkha

- **by Thaniyo Thero**

*If I experience a painful feeling in relation to a bodily sensation, such as a backache, should I then just leave that ache alone without trying to get rid of it, so that my craving and suffering diminish?*

If your attitude behind your action is not one of craving, then you can do whatever it takes to heal the backache. Lay down, take an ibuprofen, etc.

Using medicines or trying to heal the body doesn't have to involve craving, but it will unless you know the Middle way (non-lust, non-aversion, non-distraction) to escape from craving.

Pain can be managed, but one must do so in such a way that uproots one's suffering (the starving of craving) rather than managing one's suffering (the feeding of craving).

By no longer acting out of craving, which you have been doing habitually since you can remember, you can begin to discern the nature of that attitude of craving, which does not disappear as soon as you decide to stop following it. As one becomes aware of craving, one becomes aware of suffering in all its gory details. It feels pretty intense and seems like it's going to last forever. No ibuprofen or physical relaxation is going to help with that suffering. The point is that you can manage your physical pain without feeding your suffering.

When you don't act out of craving, you will discover its true nature. You get to see the extent of *Dukkha*.

Now, any act of craving, no matter how small, will fuel that dukkha and keep you confined within it. Any management of that suffering will keep you liable to the management of suffering. The only escape lies in 'patient endurance'- the Middle way. In other words, the dukkha must be experienced without adding more fuel to its fire, and as long as the craving persists, it's going to burn.

Trying to find a way to manage that suffering is inevitable. Likewise with wanting to get rid of it. And if you manage not to do that, you will come face to face with dukkha, which will seem everlasting. The goal, however, is not to be moved by it, to no longer be affected even if it is the most severe suffering you can imagine, even if it feels like it will last forever. Dukkha must be overcome, and in order to do that, you have to adopt this 'middle way of non-craving' attitude.

This non-doing of craving is one of the hardest things to accomplish. Nevertheless, if you keep trying, you can eventually find the right balance and at that *point*, you must stay, until there is no longer a problem with dukkha. Which means it's no longer dukkha.

## Sister Medhini

### Fixed Views VS Unfixed Certainties

*by Sister Medhini*

> Some of corrupt mind will speak;
> While others speak from truthful mind.
> The sage does not embark in debate born of this,
> And so, the sage is not fixed anywhere.

How to transcend one's very own view
When settled in preference, carried by zeal?
One who has formed conclusions of his own
Would speak in just the way he knows.

The one who, even unasked, speaks
To others of his own precepts and way
Is ignoble in nature, the skilled would say
Declaring himself on his own.

The calm and self-extinguished monk
Does not say of virtue "I am like this"
He, says the skilled, is of noble nature,
protruding nowhere in the world.

Whatever ideas are made and done
become polluted with preference:
Wherever one sees his own advantage
On that he rests his unstable peace.

Domains of views are not easy to surmount
where ideas are picked out and taken up.
And so, a man among these domains
In dropping one idea, takes hold of the next.

Nowhere in the world has one of clarity
A view made of being-this or not-being-that.
Clarified by giving up deception and conceit,
In what way would he, who is disengaged, go?

One engaged among ideas embarks in debate
But how to debate the disengaged – on what grounds?
It is not for him to take up and let go,
He has shaken off all views right here.

**Octad on the Corrupt** (Snp. 4.3)

There is a line of thinking regarding the practice of Dhamma that is fairly common, and which appears, on the surface, quite admirable and good. It goes along the following lines:

"Don't trust the mind. It is dangerous to think that you know something, because it is easy to build an ego out of knowledge, even knowledge of Dhamma. I don't feel the need to be certain of things. I'm okay with accepting that I am still ignorant and have much to learn."

The first thing to sort out in regard to this is what we mean by 'knowledge.' If by 'knowledge' you mean a kind of static fact or idea, then we can agree that it is indeed something for 'ego' to be built on. But there is another kind of knowledge, that can never be a fixed idea like this, but which is also certain beyond doubt, in a way that the first kind of knowledge never can be. It is only this second kind that I would call actual 'knowledge,' and this cannot be the basis for ego, because it removes the space for it.

Before trying to describe further what I mean by knowledge, I wanted to say one or two other things about fixed ideas or views. The main point is that it doesn't really matter what the idea is about, or how correct it might appear to be in terms of the information it contains: relying on, and taking for granted, *any* idea or 'statement of fact,' is what we can call 'trusting the mind'.

In this sense, even the idea that, 'I don't know, my understanding is incomplete, I still have some wrong view,' can be just as dangerous as the idea 'I know, I am right.' Even if the first of those two statements sounds better and less egotistical, it can still be a comfort zone which, in the end, causes the same kinds of problems as the second. For example, if you say 'I don't know, I'm ignorant,' then it can take away some of

the heaviness of the responsibility to think and say things that are actually true and right. If you make the disclaimer from the beginning that you are probably at least partly wrong, then you don't feel obliged to make your words and actions true and correct. If what you say does turn out to be wrong, it's not because *you* were really wrong, but because you happen to be ignorant.

In other words, accepting your ignorance as something that is just a static 'fact,' means it's not something you feel directly responsible for.[132] And in this way, the idea that you don't know becomes just something else to rest in; indirectly feeding the tendency to rely on views based on inspiration and preference. Far from being a genuine recognition of your own lack of certainty and wrong view, it's just covering it up even further.[133]

In short, you can be attached to the idea of knowing, but you can also be attached to the idea of not knowing, and in either case, the attachment to the idea is the problem, not the idea as such.

How does one become attached to such ideas? The answer is: 'by trusting the mind,' and by this I mean taking an idea for granted, in other words, *not recognising it as an idea.*

It is because of this bad faith that one ends up feeling certain about what is inherently subject to doubt. Some common examples of this include things like "The sun will rise in the east tomorrow"; "I was born in X town"; "All swans are white"; "There is no such thing as a unicorn."

But – and this is a very important 'but' – 'not trusting the mind' does not mean arbitrarily questioning everything and anything, a kind of blanket denial of any certain or absolute statement. On the contrary, there are things that you can't help knowing regardless of whether you want to or not, and doubting these, or at least overlooking their certainty, is bad faith just as surely as it is bad faith to be certain of what is doubtful.

Some examples of things that are 'already known' in this sense include: "I am currently sitting down [or insert whatever body posture you are in]"; "Black is not white"; "All circles are round"; "Pain is not pleasant."[134]

These are examples of statements that simply describe what it means for things to be the way they are, as they are experienced. They are not explaining them, or giving any new information. In a sense, they don't really *say* anything at all, which is one of the reasons they tend to get overlooked – they are so obvious that one doesn't usually think them important or worth noticing. But this is also exactly why they are certain, and why they are important.

Note that the difference between certainty and uncertainty does not depend on *what* these statements say, but on how you take them, and what is your basis for making them. It's possible to take anything at all as an idea and to rely on it as an idea, rather than as referring to one's own experience and describing its nature. Someone who accepts, for example, 'pain is not pleasant' *as a static idea or fact*, is still 'trusting the mind' and is wrong for this reason, even though whenever they feel pain, it is indeed not pleasant. Because of this, if there happens to come along a very awe-inspiring Spiritual Leader with a lot of prestige, claiming to Know and See; and he makes a brilliant argument about how, in Ultimate Reality seen through Higher Consciousness, pain can actually be pleasant; then that person will be able to doubt their former belief that pain is never pleasant. (Even though whenever they feel pain, it is still not pleasant.)

[132] If we were not responsible for maintaining ignorance (albeit 'ignorantly', and not deliberately) virtue, effort and wisdom would not be able to extract us from it – we would need the Grace of God or some similar concept.

[133] This shows that the Dhammapada verse that says 'a fool who understands that he is a fool is wise to that extent' (Dhp 63) is not as trivial as it might look at first glance. Understanding one's own lack of understanding is not a simple matter of accepting or declaring that you don't understand, not least because it is very uncomfortable to admit it honestly. Real recognition of doubt or uncertainty involves at least a degree of anxiety; the feeling that something is wrong, without knowing what, nor how to resolve it.

[134] The suttas are full of these types of statements. To gives just a couple of examples: 'There are some ascetics and brahmins who perceive that it's day when in fact it's night, or perceive that it's night when in fact it's day. This way of being of theirs is muddled, I say. I perceive that it's night when in fact it is night, and perceive that it's day when in fact it is day.' (MN 4) 'On the occasion when a man feels pleasant feeling he does not feel painful feeling or neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling: on that occasion he feels only pleasant feeling.' (DN 74) 'Furthermore, when a bhikkhu is walking he understands: 'I am walking.' When standing he understands: 'I am standing.' When sitting he understands: 'I am sitting.' And when lying down he understands: 'I am lying down.' (MN 10.) Every description of the practice of *satipaṭṭhānā* or recollection is also an example of the same principle.

The same applies even if you do actually discern the nature of pain through your own experience once or twice, to the point of being able to describe it accurately without needing to refer to an idea or view – but then afterwards go on to make it into a static notion or memory.

If anyone asks the question 'Is pain ever pleasant?' you then just refer to the memory or idea of what you previously saw, overlooking the experience as it is here and now. This is a very easy trap to fall into, because it is this kind of 'dead fish,' of an idea, easy to grasp, that one is used to dealing with. (In fact, it's precisely because of feeling the need to grasp it in this way that one creates a dead fish, ignoring all the slippery live ones.)

So the statement 'pain is not pleasant' is certain in the sense I'm talking about *only* when it refers directly to the present experience. As such, it cannot be a fixed, theoretical 'fact,' and also cannot be doubted. But it is also, clearly, timeless. The certainty of it is completely universal: it is about what it *means* for pain to be pain. When I say 'pain is not pleasant' I don't mean '*this* pain here is not pleasant' (suggesting that it might not apply to other pains on different occasions) but '*all* pain is, by definition, not pleasant,' (although that is still being discerned on the basis of this pain right here.)

The reason that all this is important is because the statement that 'all arisen things are impermanent' is of exactly the same kind as those described above, and is certain in exactly the same way. If someone is not able to see even these ordinary certainties, it will be impossible for them to see the certainty of impermanence.

I will have a couple more things to say about that, but before I do, I want to address a lurking objection that sometimes arises in regard to this subject: "But a *puthujjana* is *certain* that he has a self."

The idea with this objection is that if a *puthujjana* is wrong in being certain that he has a self, then he might also be wrong about other things of which he is seemingly certain. And so, we might conclude, as a *puthujjana*, one is not permitted to be certain of anything.

There is more than one problem with this way of thinking, some of which might already be clear from what has already been said. But the main point I want to make about it can be made with the help of a simile, which goes like this:

There is a moth flying in circles around a flame. The reason for this, so the Latest Science informs us, is not that the moth is attracted to the flame as used to be assumed, but because the light confuses his perception of direction. When he attempts to fly in a straight line, and seems from his point of view to be flying in a straight line, he instead ends up flying in circles that bring him closer and closer to the source of light (which then, of course, confuses his sense of direction even further.)

Now, suppose this moth were to hear from somewhere that although he appears to be flying in a straight line, he is, in reality, flying in circles. How should he think, then, so as to overcome the confusion and perhaps free himself from danger? In particular, would it help him to dismiss the very real impression he has of flying in a straight line as an Unreal and Uncertain illusion, adding on top of it what is, from his point of view, the purely theoretical notion that 'In Reality, I am Flying In Circles'?

It's obvious that this theoretical notion makes no difference at all to the fact that the moth still perceives himself to be flying straight, and is still perilously close to the flame. But aside from this, it results in adding a further layer of self-deception to the illusion of the light, making the problem worse. Once the moth starts denying parts of his own experience in this way, he may now feel free to ignore other aspects of it – such as the heat he feels as he gets closer and closer to the flame.[135]

The only way for him to get out of his predicament would be to understand why the impression of flying in a straight line is not what it appears to be. But this can only be done on the basis of first admitting it for what it is.

For the same reason, one of the worst mistakes you can make as puthujjana is to deny the reality of things that you are certain of, including your own sense of self. You are guaranteed to be closer to 'seeing things as

[135]We might even suspect that turning a blind eye to the imminent sense of danger (which brings some measure of relief for someone who does not see the escape from it) is, at least in part, the real motivation for adopting this sort of view in the first place.

they really are' by honestly admitting, and describing as accurately as possible, your actual lived experience as you really see it, *especially* if this differs from the ideas and information you have of how you are supposed to be seeing it. (And this applies to everybody, *puthujjana* or not.)

For someone who is able to admit this, there are the following points that can become clear regarding the 'certainty' of one's own self, which are relevant to understanding it for what it is (i.e. not what it appears to be):

First, it is obvious that one is not fabricating a false belief in self out of nowhere and holding to it out of sheer stubbornness. A *puthujjana's* 'certainty' of his self is not just a kind of pig-headed refusal to change his mind (if only abandoning ignorance were that easy).

But at the same time, an authentic recognition of one's own self is invariably bound up with at least a degree of anxiety and doubt, and comes with various questions that demand to be answered and yet are clearly unanswerable.[136] The knowledge of one's own self is inherently something uneasy, ambiguous, and even contradictory – yet still unmistakably *there*. In other words, it contains internal evidence of involving some sort of mistake, even if one can't see what the mistake is. ('Why do I feel more heat the more I fly away from the flame?')

The bad faith of both kinds described earlier – being certain about what is uncertain, and not recognising the certainty of what is certain – is actually central to this mistake. A *puthujjana* is certain of *something*, which he *believes*, or takes for granted, to be his self. However, he is habitually trained in turning a blind eye to certainties, and holding beliefs as though they were certain. And so he cannot distinguish the 'belief' that identifies his self as a kind of superfluous and unnecessary taint of the phenomenon whose certainty (and impermanence) underlies it.

The crucial point, especially when it comes to undoing this, is that it's not simply a matter of intellectually sorting out the difference between certain and uncertain statements. (This would not require a Buddha – a decent logician would be good enough.) The unwholesome 'training' I'm referring to is on the level of day-to-day attitudes, habits and actions; and it can be basically be boiled down to appeasing doubts with explanations, and justifying actions with some form of excuse.

Some examples of this are things like: 'I'm angry because others are being cruel'; 'It's okay because others do it' 'I should do this because others expect it,' 'I don't need to keep this rule because I'm not a monk;'; 'I'm justified in saying this because there's a tradition of it[137]; 'It's not a waste of time because it's to do with the Dhamma'; 'Others don't see this, so I must be imagining it (or they must be lying)'; 'It's because of certain hormones in the brain'; 'It's because I'm ignorant'; 'I mustn't do it because it's against the rule,' 'If the teacher says it, it must be right,'; 'I must not do this because it is bad.'
And so on.

It will be clear that these types of acts of body, speech and mind come in varying degrees of subtlety and are extremely pervasive. What they all have in common is that they are 'trusting the mind'. They take for granted an idea that is uncertain – "Others/things in the world are like X, Y or Z" – and prioritise it over and above what is absolutely certain, because it is the very basis for that same action: namely the intention behind it, and the feeling that it is rooted in, whether agreeable, disagreeable, or neither-agreeable-nor-disagreeable.

Anything that goes against the basic precepts follows this principle. And so it is not incidental that the most practical way to train in 'self-effacement' – in other words, to undo the bad faith involved in maintaining one's sense of self – is described by MN 8 in the following terms:

> 'Others will be cruel, but here we will not be cruel.'
> 'Others will kill living beings, but here we will not kill living beings.' 'Others will steal, but here we will not steal.'
> 'Others will be unchaste, but here we will not be unchaste.'

[136] The questions of the *puttujhana* in MN 2 are the ideal illustrations of this: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? This creature—where did it come from? And where will it go?'

[137] 'Tradition', it's good to note, means the particular tradition with which one feels associated, even if that happens to be a very tiny minority in relation to the general tradition of 'Buddhism'.

'Others will lie, but here we will not lie.'
…..
'Others will be jealous, but here we will be without jealousy.'
'Others will be stingy, but here we will be without stinginess.'
'Others will be devious, but here we will not be devious.'

MN 8

The point of putting in this specific way – 'Although others will do X, here we will not do X' – is that, while unwholesome actions always involve some form of the kinds of denials and excuses I've been describing, even the undertaking of 'wholesome' actions needs to be developed with an attitude that does not depend on any idea relating to 'others' in order to justify or support it. (And here, 'an idea relating to others' ultimately means any idea at all, whether its content involves 'the world', or 'my self' or even 'my mind.')

Of course, one will inevitably begin by relying on such ideas. The point then, (which requires already being established in quite a degree of virtue and restraint,) is simply to start noticing whenever you are falling back on *any* idea to explain or justify what you believe and how you act; including in seemingly 'good' ways. You cannot get rid of these ideas, nor do you need to, but you can become aware of them *as ideas*, and this is already enough to avoid taking them for granted as a basis for actions and views.

The other side of this same coin is to start recognising or admitting the intention, or even more immediately, the pain or pleasure behind whatever you may be doing. This is possible precisely because it precedes any idea, explanation or excuse for it, and as such, is already known beyond doubt.

Practically speaking, this feeling will most accurately be found right where your 'sense of self' is. This point leads me finally back to what I mentioned earlier in regard to the certainty of the statement that 'all arisen things are impermanent.' Like the example of 'pain is not pleasant' which does not require examination of a large number of painful experiences, because it is about what it *means* for pain to be pain; the statement that 'all arisen things are impermanent' is a description of what it *means* for an arisen thing to be an arisen thing.

This means that in order to see the certainty of impermanence, all you need is one clear and undiluted example of an arisen thing. All the difficulty in seeing it is to do with obtaining just one such example.

The problem is that whatever is seen 'ignorantly' (i.e. through eyes of *avijja*) is not an arisen thing in its entirety, but 'an object (appearing to me)' or 'me (looking at an object)'.[138] In other words, no matter where and what you look at, 'you' are there in the background looking at it, and whatever impermanence you see in any object will be only a kind of relative impermanence against 'you', which by definition is a kind of unchanging reference point for everything else.

This is why learning to recognise that which is already certain or known, in the sense that's relevant to this problem, comes down to the same thing as becoming aware of the 'background' of your experience, which is where your 'self' is. Or, more accurately, it is where certain less obvious aspects of whatever has arisen are always being pushed out of the picture and overlooked (through prioritising ideas, sense objects, explanations as described above), and that is how they are implicitly identified as one's self. The point of the practice is to get to see whatever is 'in the background' as simply an inseparable aspect of the entirety of whatever has arisen.

It will be obvious from all that has gone before, but might be worth repeating nonetheless, that 'the background' is not a fixed or static thing. It just refers to the fact that, to take again the example of feeling, whatever is experienced is *felt* (as agreeable, disagreeable or neither), and the feeling is always 'in the background' in regard to the experience. Whenever you turn to 'look' directly at feeling, now what you are looking at is no longer feeling, but an idea of it; and that in turn involves feeling in regard to *it*.

So in order to know *vedana* for what it is, you have to know it *through* 'feeling it' in regard to things you are experiencing, without making an idea out of it. In other words, you have to learn how to let it be what

[138] "Q. When is a thing not a thing? A. When it is mine." (Seeking the Path, 2010 p. 411)

it is on its own terms; by 'enduring it,' and not acting out of it, whether by leaning towards or away from whatever thing is being felt.

It's through this 'leaning' and acting out, far more than any lack of active thinking about it, that what is already known gets ignored, pushed out of the picture, and identified as one's self. And so, if you train towards not acting out of feeling to any extent at all, you will be making it possible to see its impermanence, and practising self-effacement, even if everything else I've attempted to say here goes in one ear and out the other.

## Living Under An Authority

PDF of the article

- **by Sister Medhini**

As long as one is alive, being subject to some sort of authority or authorities is inevitable[1]. An authority is here meant in a rather general sense of something or someone who is in a position to exert influence or control over your behavior or circumstances, in ways that may be covert or overt.

Most of the time, an authority has to either convince, persuade or hypnotize us that to follow his rule is indeed what is for our benefit and is the best thing to do, (so that we do so of our own accord); or use more subtle ways of making life a bit less agreeable for people who don't do so, so that they will modify their behavior as a reflex, but without being generally aware of why they are doing so. As a last resort, authorities may turn to brute force. But this is unsustainable over long periods and with large numbers of people. So generally it is only used in certain extreme cases (i.e. the inmates of prisons), or extreme scenarios (war, etc.)

An example of authority benignly doing its job in the first manner would be something like city councils providing footpaths for people to walk on in cities, while the rest of the road is designated for cars. I've never heard anyone complaining about the curtailment of their freedom to walk in whatever part of the road they please. I would bet that very few people even see this as an imposed structure on their behavior by an authority, (although it is). The arrangement is simply taken for granted, for the rather good reason that it factually works. And there is a generally shared understanding of this.

Obviously, it would be good – ideal – if every form of imposed structure on people's behavior by authorities, could be like this; and would always be something that everyone could comply with willingly and in full awareness. But what is required for that is that everyone involved should have a shared understanding of, and agreement on, the arrangement that will be for the welfare of all; or at least a common *view* as to the *principles* governing such an arrangement. And this is an impossibility. Even in very small and specific communities, it is close to impossible, though not *entirely* impossible.[2]

So practically always, at least some of the people will need some persuading, and even with much persuasion and propaganda, many people will need a degree of faith that the authority knows what is best for them better than they themselves do, or they will follow orders with a degree of skepticism and a degree of reluctance, just for the sake of not being harassed by the authority or by others.

### Owner of your actions

The first important point to understand regarding this is the following: no authority can *make* anyone do anything.

*Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, and have their actions as their refuge. – MN 135*

Nobody else can possibly be responsible for your own deed. All an authority can do is impose certain consequences for not acting according to their law; or offer certain rewards for acting according to their law. They can also (more underhandly) choose to curtail or control people's access to information, or use other means to take advantage of people's inauthenticity so that although people appear to be doing something 'of their own accord'; in truth, almost nobody is genuinely taking responsibility for their own choice to do

such and such thing, but rather acting out of fear or a sense of duty to do what they are 'supposed to be doing.'

Or, In the best case, if the authority has some wisdom, they can clearly and properly set forth, according to proper reasoning, why acting in such and such a way is for your welfare and benefit, acting in such and such ways is for your harm and the harm of others; so that you understand for yourself why it is better to act in this way and can take responsibility for that choice, without resenting the authority.[3]

So to re-emphasize, no authority can make anyone act in a particular way. All they can do is influence the consequences of acting in one way or another. Yet, for much of their lives, people end up doing lots of things – even most things – with the impression of being to some extent *obliged* to do them. What this impression practically involves is the belief that there *is no other choice.* In truth, though, there is always another choice to act differently – which will necessarily have consequences. Some are worse than others.

When somebody cannot bear so much as thinking about certain kinds of consequences, they habitually shut their eyes to the mere possibility of a whole range of actions that might provoke such consequences, and consequently, feel *obliged* to act in certain ways. (This is only part of the story, though, because while entertaining the possibility of an action with very unpleasant consequences is painful enough, it is still generally not as painful as having to face, time and time again, the need to make a decision 'what should I do?' with the full weight of that decision lying squarely on one's own shoulders.)

Being authentic involves refusing to allow yourself any notion of being obliged to do anything, and taking responsibility for every single choice you make. This is what will force you to be honest about why you are choosing one thing and not another. To take a common contemporary example, if somebody has doubts about a certain vaccine but happens to have a job for which the vaccine is mandatory, it would be easy for them to feel that they are being obliged to be vaccinated against their will; not acknowledging the fact that the choice to act differently is still open to them, though the consequences of it might be quite unpleasant to face. An authentic person would be able to reflect, for example, *I'm getting this vaccine because, although I don't trust that I have at hand all the relevant information, and I do think I could be taking a risk; on the whole, I still don't see this as justifying giving up my job while having children to support.* (It should of course be borne in mind that this is just one example for illustrative purposes, the reader may replace it with whatever equivalent example they can think of.)

**What is not yours**

Perhaps slightly harder to understand, but equally important, is the point that not only are you solely responsible for your own actions, but you are responsible for; the owner of, *solely* your own actions – *nothing else*.

Anyone who has been born is subject to all sorts of changes, disturbances, and troubles that are *utterly inaccessible* to their control. The actions of other people, the quality and quantity of information you have access to, the words of other people, the conditions of the world; the weather, and the state of health and decline of your own body – all come under this. In other words, you can decide what you do; but that choice and the motivation for it is always strictly internal; there is no way for your choice to access things beyond it, just as there is no way for other things or people to access the domain of your own intentional choice.

Specifically, when you make a choice out of wanting to avoid a certain unpleasant result, or wanting to arrive at a certain pleasant result, any result that comes about whether it is experienced as pleasant or unpleasant – is in an entirely different domain. It happens, so to speak, by itself.

So for instance, in the example above, somebody might say 'But it's not *right* that they make vaccination mandatory for nurses, there *shouldn't* be this consequence for this kind of choice.' But these are quite clearly things that belong to others, and that pertains in fact to an entire domain that doesn't and cannot belong to you. Whether other people think and act rightly or wrongly, belongs to them; what belongs to you are, for instance, the words that you can say to them, but you can't give them anything more than the sound of your voice. Equally, in terms of your own body's health or sickness, all that you have is the ability to administer medicine and the possibility to investigate the causes of disease, but that is as far as it goes. Whether the

medicine works and how it works, belongs to what is essentially the nature of matter, a different domain that is totally beyond your ability to access.

Thinking rightly or wrongly depends on the degree to which our thought corresponds to how things actually are. Whenever people act wrongly and harmfully, they are trying to exert control and mastery over things (like other people's actions) that can't possibly be controlled by them.

So an authority can at any time arbitrarily decide to impose restrictions and strictures on your own daily life whenever they so choose. If a person is bothered by this, although the change to their life might be troublesome in itself in various ways, what is truly bothersome is the fact that it should be possible at all. (That's when you hear people saying things like 'that shouldn't be allowed… we should be consulted… there should be some process or other…' etc.) But this comes back to why I began with this first point, which is something a person needs to see for themselves at least to some extent if any of this is to be comprehensible: to live as a human being (or indeed any kind of being) is to have *some* sort of authority over you. Such that the conditions of your life and the consequences of everyday actions may be suddenly changed at any moment.

So this bother is a recognition of something much more deep-rooted and universal, which is this very discrepancy I'm trying to get at: those things that one naturally takes to be one's own and holds dear, are fundamentally *not* one's own. (Because if some aspect of your life may be arbitrarily taken away by some authority or other, whether for valid reasons or not, then it must necessarily belong more to the authority than it does to you.)

"*I have sons, I have wealth."*

*Thus the fool frets.*

*He himself is not his own -.*

*How then, sons? How then, wealth?* – Dhp 62

Being a fundamental bother, pertaining to the nature of things in general, the only way to overcome it is to address it at this level. (rather than, say, taking up specific issues with the city council or what-have-you.)

This is done by, in a nutshell, learning how to stop mistakenly holding as your own those things which cannot be your own.

**How to let go of what isn't yours.**

This phrase, 'let go of what isn't yours,' is repeated many times in the suttas, and is something that is repeated a lot in Buddhism generally. The problem is that at least most people if they try to simply *do* this directly, will probably end up doing it wrongly. (The reason being that they would be trying to 'let go' of things by way of the exact same attitude and view with which they were holding those things from the beginning. In other words, if it were really up to you whether to let go of something or to keep it, then we wouldn't have a problem. The point is to recognize that regardless of whether you let go or not, the thing was never yours, to begin with.)

That is why I have been emphasizing responsibility: it might seem paradoxical, but the most practical way to let go of futile suffering is to *first fully accept* all the responsibility wherever you possibly can – and never allow yourself to be obliged to act in any way. If a person were to genuinely take this as a practice and keep it in mind throughout everything they were to do, it would naturally become possible for them to give up the source of this bother (and ultimately the source of all bother whatsoever.)

One practical example of this at a relatively mundane level would follow from the one I gave above: if somebody took a vaccine while feeling obliged to do so, either because of a general sense of duty despite some misgivings, or even because it was mandatory for them to keep their job; if they later find out that the authority – who they deem responsible for *making* them take the vaccine – had not been honest, and/or the vaccine turns out to have worse side-effects than imagined, their mind will then definitely give rise to quite a lot of anger, frustration, and resentment.

But if somebody took a vaccine while being fully clear and authentic about their reasons for doing so, aware that they were taking a risk, and that they were choosing to do so because it was still overall the better choice rather than the available alternatives – then they might find out the exact same information, or even undergo some actual ill-effect of vaccination, but would suffer far less mental disturbance and turmoil on account of it. Nor would this make them any less capable of seeing and judging the immorality of the actions of the relevant authorities.

More generally, if you start correctly seeing the domain of your responsibility, this will also naturally make you more able to see where it ends; what is *not* in your hand and not up to you. This includes pretty much everything else, most pertinently the things that happen to you, and whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.

You could then recognize the following very important truth: that aversion, fear, or really any kind of *bother* regarding anything that can arise, is directly maintained by assuming that the painful thing *is* the situation, and so trying to deal with it, avoid it, get rid of it, etc – to get rid of the pain of it. (Incidentally, but importantly, it's also maintained by acting on the corresponding assumption regarding *pleasant* things, assuming that pleasure is to be found *in* a particular experience or situation; so I must get it, access it, experience it, have it.) In trying to deal with things on this level, you keep maintaining the notion that you *could* have some say in the situation, that you can 'get at it'. Which is exactly how you allow things to 'get at you'.

An image that might help to convey this is a small room, with six windows or doors, and this room confines you, while you keep trying to get out of it. But each time you break down one of its windows or doors or try and go out to the thing you see passing outside, the initial release quickly reveals itself to be another – slightly smaller – version of the exact same room.

For as long as you keep trying to escape in that way, you will maintain the implicit assumption that this sort of escape *can* provide release. And you won't see how your escape attempts are what is making the room even smaller, the confinement even tighter, nor will it be possible to see the genuine release. And that is because the genuine release is not *outside* of the confinement, but more like a kind of reconfiguration of your vision so that you can see how the same thing is not confining at all anymore – precisely because you see that there is no need to escape in that way, *which was never possible to the begin with.*

In practical terms, it comes down, again, to realize that any suffering at all is never because of the situation, but purely because of the aversion or craving regarding it: an entirely unnecessary, futile, and gratuitous thing for which you are directly and solely responsible. Again, this sentence can be stated theoretically, but it has to be recognized through truly seeing that which is *not up to you*: whatever you do, in a fundamental sense your situation is always going its own way. It gets better sometimes, it gets worse sometimes. This would be how you can see that your only responsibility therein is also what is at the root of all that is painful and suffering in it, namely the craving, which is maintained *by trying to deal with the situation so as to get rid of the pain of it.* And if you were to see this you could let go of it, which is when you would not suffer albeit amidst the same circumstances that would previously have caused you much suffering.

**The extremity**

It might be asked whether there is any limit to this principle. – I have said 'no matter what the situation'; is this a figure of speech that in some extreme scenario no longer holds true? The answer is that there are no limits whatsoever to how far it *can* be taken, depending on how seriously one takes the fundamental problem of one's life and the degree of effort one is prepared to dedicate to the task of overcoming it. The suttas give many rather extreme examples of people who, having developed their minds along such lines, do not experience anguish, even amidst the worst kinds of suffering. My favorite is the story of a laywoman called 'Nanda's mother,' who recounts the following:

*I had an only son called Nanda who was dear and pleasing to me. The rulers forcibly abducted him on some pretext and had him executed. But when my son was under arrest or being arrested, imprisoned or being put in prison, killed or being killed, I cannot recall any change in the state of my mind." – AN 7.53.*

This might seem initially like a totally incomprehensible or impossible feat, only explicable by some sort of mystical or magical transformation of a person into some sort of robot. (And many Buddhists do end up

taking it like this, though they might not admit it). But it is simply the result of the same principle as we have been describing being applied and developed to its full extent.

From a slightly different angle, if one takes responsibility for choosing to live in the domain of a certain authority that one considers to be oppressive, then the first natural reaction is to search for a different place where there will be a less oppressive authority in charge. But still, as I said, one will have to live under some authority or another; and this principle has no limit: here is a passage from the suttas spoken by Mara, who in the suttas is a deity who holds the position of a top bureaucrat over the system of samsara, (by which he is equally fully bound).

"*The eye is mine, ascetic, forms are mine, eye-contact and its base of consciousness are mine. Where can you go, ascetic, to escape from me? The ear is mine, ascetic, sounds are mine … The nose is mine, ascetic, odors are mine … The tongue is mine, ascetic, tastes are mine … The body is mine, ascetic, tactile objects are mine … The mind is mine, ascetic, mental phenomena are mine, mind-contact and its base of consciousness are mine. Where can you go, ascetic, to escape from me?" – SN 4.19*

In another sense, pertinently, Mara is also called the King of Death, and this could be taken in a very literal sense. To be in the realm of Mara is to be subject to old age and death. That is what holds sway over the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. That is the ultimate authority. And the escape from it is still the same.

"*That of which they say 'It's mine,'*

*And those who speak in terms of 'mine'—*

*If your mind exists among these,*

*You won't escape me, ascetic."*

*The Blessed One:*

"*That which they speak of is not mine,*

*I'm not one of those who speak of mine.*

*You should know thus, O Evil One:*

*Even my path you will not see." – SN 4.19*

1 'you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed' – Bob Dylan

2 The requirement is pretty much that such a community should be a community of noble disciples; i.e. people who possess the Right View, one of the characteristics of which is 'seeing right as right and wrong as wrong'; another characteristic being that all not only have the same goal – liberation from birth, death and suffering- but the same understanding of how to achieve that goal. Note that this is absolutely NOT the same as a cult, in which people voluntarily deny their own individual point of view in favour of that of the group and the leader – in this, rather, each person has individually come to an understanding of certain fundamental principles that are timeless and universal, and each of them are individually also defined as 'independent of others.' Unlike a cult, for such individuals it is irrelevant whether they are alone or in a group, aside from practical convenience and similar considerations. But because their understanding pertains to something universal, they will naturally be 'on the same page' at least as far as important things go, without needing very much in the way of micro-managed rules to govern their behavior.

3 Actually, if this is taken to its conclusion such an authority can't really be called 'an authority' in the usual sense of the word. The Buddha being the obvious example that comes to mind, who specifically stated on several occasions that it was not up to him whether people followed his instructions or not; and he particularly did *not* think of himself as an authority over the monks.

*But Ananda, what does the Sangha expect from me? I have taught the Dhamma, Ananda, having made no secret opposed to the public. The Perfected One has no closed teacher's fist with regard to teachings. If anyone thinks, 'I shall take charge of the Sangha,' or 'the Sangha should refer to me,' let him make some statement about the Sangha; but the Perfected One does not think in this way.) – DN 16.*

## Straightening of Crookedness

*by Sister Medhini*

It is in virtue of intentionality that actions are actions.

The quality of an intention is its motivation. Whether an action is harmful or harmless; blameworthy or blameless; good or bad, depends entirely and solely on what motivates it.

Regardless of everything else – the specific situation, the immediate or superficial outcome, and whether people approve of it or not – an action motivated by greed cannot be harmless or blameless. The same applies to any action motivated by aversion (which includes fear, irritation, impatience and so on, as well as outright anger). And the same also applies to whatever is motivated by sheer carelessness or disregard.

These attitudes are, in themselves, the essence of limitation, discord and crookedness – they are, in short, suffering. And all they can do is perpetuate suffering.

Whenever beings have brought misery to themselves and to others, and whenever there has ever been conflict, oppression, cruelty and destruction, it has always been through actions born of greed, aversion and carelessness. Whenever beings act from these motivations, they participate in creating the misery of the world. They then inherit the misery of the world they create.

Therefore, if a person wants to cease to participate in the world's misery and its crookedness, his task is this: he should train himself to not act, speak or think in ways that are crooked by greed, crooked by aversion, or crooked by carelessness.

*

This task is not complicated. It is, however, subtle and challenging in a way that is not comparable to any other aim; and it is missed by virtually the entire world. What makes it so?

Acting in these crooked ways implies that one's entire perspective is crooked through and through. In particular: to the extent that one is greedy, they do not see their own greed, but only the thing they want. To the extent that one is averse, they do not see their own aversion, but only the thing they want rid of. To the extent that one is careless, they must be careless first and foremost of their own carelessness. In this way, one's vision of what one needs to give up is obscured by those very things.

So, since each person is already living to some degree greedily, aversely and carelessly, their very efforts to give up their own crookedness will begin crookedly. They will be too tight, (aiming to get rid of irrelevant things that do not pertain to the problem at hand) or too loose (failing to abandon important things that very much do pertain to the problem). Or, often, some of both.

How, then, to begin in such a way that, if it were followed through to its conclusion, would lead to unlimiting what is limited and straightening what is crooked, rather than creating further layers of limitation and another variety of crookedness?

*

Certain behaviours are of a nature to be always blameworthy and harmful. Killing is the first example: only one who is motivated by at least a degree of greed, aversion or carelessness, can deliberately kill another living creature. The same applies to stealing and lying. It also applies to sexual misbehaviour, and the use of intoxicants.

So for one wishing to train themselves in the task being described, these things prohibited by the five precepts are the first basic reference points for what one must be willing to not do, ever again.

Undertaking even this much, in the unconditional manner that the task demands, requires a degree of faith at first. It might be reasonably obvious that these actions are generally bad (especially when you are on the receiving end of them). But it cannot be self-evident from the beginning why they are always bad, without exception.

Even if you are not particularly tempted to act in such ways at this moment, a degree of honest reflection will show that situations could arise in which you would feel compelled to do so. They would seem to offer the only hope of getting out of a certain constraint, or relieving a particular kind of burden. And under the weight of that burden, and the force of that constraint, you would want to justify doing something drastic about it, even if there were no guarantee that it would work – even knowing that, sooner or later, a time will have to come when everything in your power will be powerless against it.

Even now in simply thinking about it, you can recognise and feel the unease in being liable to that precise kind of burden and constraint.

It is this unease – this suffering, and no other, that needs to be fully understood; for it is right here that there is all the difference between a crooked view and a straight one. If you could fully understand this very suffering and see the nature of this difference, right there and then you would be free from it.

*

The difference is this. The attitude of greed, aversion or carelessness that is present wherever there is that sense of burden and constraint, is the source of the entire burden and all of the constraint. There is no other source of suffering but this.

No matter what you might want: whether coarse, subtle, far, near, internal, external, great or little – while not having, and while having it; while keeping it and while losing it, the greedy attitude in regard to it is suffering in the beginning, suffering in the middle and suffering in the end. No matter what you might fear, dislike, want rid of: while dreading it and while running from it, while avoiding it and while caught with it; the aversion in regard to it is all of the suffering in each and every way of it. And in whatever is neither wanted nor unwanted, the attitude of carelessly disregarding it is already suffering in and of itself.

But, as was said in the beginning: the nature of being greedy is to only see the thing you want, and not your own greed. And not seeing your own greed is how you continue to be greedy.

So to clearly see and comprehend the full and exact extent of your own greed while it is there, as opposed to later when you have already acted out of it; would have to mean ceasing to be greedy right there and then. Only then would you truly see that very greed as the source of suffering. And by the same token you would know clearly what greed is, and you would know exactly how to not act in ways that are crooked by greed – or aversion, or carelessness – which are really just different styles of the same thing.

*

This is not something that one can simply choose to see, because both one's choices and one's seeing are crooked from the start. By being greedy, you continue to not see your own greed. And 'being greedy' means doing greedy actions, speaking greedy words and thinking greedy thoughts.

That is why the only possible beginning that can lead one in the right direction is resolving to not do actions based on that specific kind of burdened-and-constrained motivation, for which the basic precepts are the essential reference points.

It is better to begin by sincerely taking just the five precepts as reference points in this sense, then to take on a great many rules to follow just because they are rules. Having developed this to a sufficient degree, the eight precepts are not seen as 'additional rules'. They are, rather, a more refined or detailed description of the very same framework in which one is already training. (The most important example of this is the deliberately vague phrase 'sexual misbehaviour' – one could regard 'non-celibacy' as simply a less vague term for the same precept.) And the entire gradual training and practice can, and should, be seen as nothing but the development and refinement of this same thread through to its conclusion in every respect. There is nothing extra to add to it.

Not perpetuating these actions, and not adding anything else to fill the gap: that is how there is the unlimiting of what is limited and the straightening of what is crooked in your own perspective – in spite of yourself.

It has to be 'in spite of yourself' in this way, and it is this that makes this task so challenging in a way unlike

any other: in order to even begin to purify your own point of view, you must be willing to undermine and put that point of view second – which each person implicitly cherishes and wants to keep above all else.

Yet even here, the root cause of the difficulty is one and the same: whatever anxiety and unease there is in the thought of undermining the thing one wants to keep, is rooted in nothing but the greed of wanting to keep it.

*

> Greedy, absorbed and entranced with pleasures,
>
> They are hard to correct, being set in crooked ways.
>
> Brought into suffering, they lament:
>
> "What will become of us when we fall from here?"
>
> So a person should train themselves in this way:
>
> Whatever they might recognise as crooked in the world,
>
> They should not let that cause them to act crookedly,
>
> For this life is not long, as the wise would say.
>
> Snp 4.2

> "Bhikkhus, abandon the unwholesome! It is possible to abandon the unwholesome. If it were not possible to abandon the unwholesome, I would not say:"Bhikkhus, abandon the unwholesome!' But because it is possible to abandon the unwholesome, I say: 'Bhikkhus, abandon the unwholesome!'
>
> If this abandoning of the unwholesome led to harm and suffering, I would not tell you to abandon it. But because the abandoning of the unwholesome leads to welfare and happiness, I say: 'Bhikkhus, abandon the unwholesome!'
>
> AN 2.19

> A noble disciple understands the detrimental and its root, and the beneficial and its root. To this extent a noble disciple is one of right and straight view, who has absolute confidence in the Dhamma, and has come to the true Dhamma.
>
> But what is the detrimental (unwholesome) and what is its root? And what is the beneficial and what is its root? Killing living beings, stealing, and sexual misconduct; speech that's false, divisive, harsh, or frivolous; longing, aversion, and wrong view. This is called the detrimental.
>
> And what is the root of the detrimental? Greed, aversion, and muddledness (= carelessness, disregard). This is called the root of the detrimental.
>
> And what is the beneficial? Abstaining from killing living beings, stealing, and sexual misconduct; avoiding speech that's false, divisive, harsh, or frivolous; non-longing, non-ill-will, and right view. This is called the beneficial.
>
> And what is the root of the beneficial? Non-greed, non-aversion, and non-muddledness. This is called the root of the beneficial.
>
> MN 9

> 'Bhikkhus, one who sees suffering also sees the origin of suffering, also sees the cessation of suffering, also sees the way leading to the cessation of suffering. One who sees the origin of suffering also sees suffering, also sees the cessation of suffering, also sees the way leading to the cessation of suffering. One who sees the cessation of suffering also sees suffering, also sees the origin of suffering, also sees the way leading to the cessation of suffering. One who sees the way

leading to the cessation of suffering also sees suffering, also sees the origin of suffering, also sees the cessation of suffering.' (SN 56.30)

The king asked: 'Why is it, friend chariotmaker, that the wheel that took six days to finish rolled as far as the impetus carried it, and then wobbled and fell to the ground, while the wheel that took six months less six days to finish rolled as far as the impetus carried it and then stood still as if fixed on an axle?'

"The chariotmaker replied: 'The wheel that took six days to finish, lord, has a rim that is crooked, faulty, and defective; spokes that are crooked, faulty, and defective; and a nave that is crooked, faulty, and defective. For this reason, it rolled as far as the impetus carried it and then it wobbled and fell to the ground. But the wheel that took six months less six days to finish has a rim without crookedness, faults, and defects; it has spokes without crookedness, faults, and defects; and it has a nave that is without crookedness, faults, and defects. For this reason, it rolled as far as the impetus carried it and then stood still as if fixed on an axle.'

"It may be, bhikkhus, that you think: 'On that occasion the chariotmaker was someone else.' But you should not think in such a way. On that occasion, I myself was the chariotmaker. Then I was skilled in crookedness, faults, and defects in wood. But now I am the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One, skilled in crookedness, faults, and defects of the body; skilled in crookedness, faults, and defects of speech; and skilled in crookedness, faults, and defects of mind.

"Any bhikkhu or bhikkhunī who has not abandoned crookedness, faults, and defects of the body, speech, and mind has fallen down from this Dhamma and discipline, just as the wheel that was finished in six days fell to the ground.

"Any bhikkhu or bhikkhunī who has abandoned crookedness, faults, and defects of the body, speech, and mind is established in this Dhamma and discipline, just as the wheel that was finished in six months less six days remained standing.

"Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: 'We will abandon crookedness, faults, and defects of the body; we will abandon crookedness, faults, and defects of speech; we will abandon crookedness, faults, and defects of the mind.' It is in this way that you should train yourselves."

AN 3.15

## Homelessness is Nibbana

*by Sister Medhini*

1. There are a range of different views and positions on the question of whether one 'must be a monk to practice the Dhamma' or whether the Buddha's teaching is 'only for monks' or not. Regardless of the particular stance, however, all seem to overlook the basic reason and context for one going forth that is explicitly described in the suttas – not only once or twice, but countless times. Here is one instance:

*Formerly, friends, when living as a householder, I was without wisdom. Then the Tathagata, or his disciple, taught me the dhamma. On hearing that dhamma, I acquired faith in the Tathagata.* ******With that faith, I reflected: "The household life is confined, a dusty path; going forth is open air. It is not easy, while settled at home, to lead this holy life, utterly perfect and entirely pure as a polished conch-shell.****** *Why don't I shave off my hair and beard, put on the ochre robes, and go forth from home into homelessness?*

*MN 112*

The main point of this passage, which seems to be quite easily missed, is the fact that seeing the household life as a claustrophobic and polluted atmosphere, where it is 'not easy to lead the holy life,' is far from being a personal whim that happens to occur to some people and not others. It is the immediate and natural consequence of hearing the dhamma, gaining faith in it, and reflecting on one's situation through that faith. And so if somebody is very committed to practicing the dhamma yet at the same time sees no problem or

contradiction with living at home while doing so, then it is very likely because their idea of both the practice and the goal is quite different from what the monk in the above passage is referring to.[139]

2. The nature of the goal is described as follows, in again a very familiar passage that occurs repeatedly:

*This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is:****** the stilling of all activities, the relinquishment of all acquisitions*******, the destruction of craving, cessation – Nibbāna.*

*AN 11.7*

Household life, on the other hand, refers to the life that is bound up with acquisitions and the constant activity of acquiring, maintaining and protecting them. Similarly, a 'home' is basically a comfort zone; a situation that you regard as yours to manage according to your preference and where you have a sense of control and familiarity.

As such, the total and unconditional abandonment of household life should not be seen as something one may or may not have to do in order to then go on to practice and attain Nibbāna. – it *is* Nibbāna.

That is why there can be no attainment of arahantship as a layperson, any more than there can be the relinquishment of all acquisition without relinquishing any acquisitions. A layman becomes an arahant precisely in virtue of giving up everything that makes him a layman. Along the same lines, only an arahant is incapable of returning to the household life[140], and strictly speaking, only he is said to be truly worthy of the designation 'bhikkhu' or 'renunciate'.

*He for whom in all name and form*

*There is no sense of ownership*

*Who does not sorrow from what is not –*

*He is called a 'bhikkhu.'*

*Dhp 367*

If this is not understood, it is quite natural for someone to 'go forth' as a monk only to seek new comfort zones and different ways to feel at home, so that in spite of wearing robes and adhering to rules, he is still very much a householder in the way that matters. Some degree of this is unavoidable: giving up any major worldly home will inevitably be done on the basis of leaning on a subtler one initially. This in itself is not a problem, as long as you are careful not to allow yourself to feel fully justified in doing so, or think that becoming a monk will do the work of relinquishment for you.

3. What all this implies is that practicing homelessness rightly does not actually start with ordaining as a monk, but with learning and gaining clarity and faith in regard to the harm and danger of acquisition, and the value of renunciation.

In terms of this reflection and understanding, the point that has to be very much stressed is that it is the comfort of household life that makes it 'crowded and dusty', much more so than all the hassle and burden that people put up with for the sake of that comfort. So, in order to place yourself at what is the very starting point of the gradual training in the suttas, you need to start thinking in a way that leads to seeing the dependency on whatever pleasures and comforts define 'home' for you, as confinement and dust.

What are these pleasures and comforts that constitute confinement? Although there are as many varieties of comfort zones as individuals[141], sensuality – that is to say, pleasures and attractions dependent on sights,

[139] There are of course many accounts of laypeople who heard the dhamma, gained faith and still chose not to become monks or were not able to; but what the above passage makes very clear is that their choice of living as a householder could only be made in spite of their faith, not because of it. To whatever degree they were to have reflected on the faith and the understanding of the dhamma they had gained, they too would have been seeing their environment filled with belongings and attachments as confining, dusty, entrapping and unsafe. And it is precisely this way of regarding it that would have been the basis for whatever degree of progress they made within their environment of household life.

[140] See AN 9.7 and 9.8

[141] A comfort zone need not even necessarily be physically 'comfortable' in order to qualify as such. For example, a stereotypical home is a well-furnished dwelling where one stays all the time, but equally, constantly moving from one situation to another without

sounds, smells, tastes and touches – is the primordial comfort zone for anyone born human. Everything in household life aims at and circles around it, and, for one with faith in the dhamma reflecting rightly through that faith, it is this that is invariably seen as a baited trap.

4. This type of reflection is the *only* way to abandon these fundamental ties of the household life, which can only be fully relinquished on the level of the internal safety and delight in them (as opposed to somehow getting rid of, or becoming unpercepient of all agreeable sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches). The same in fact applies to giving up anything to which you are attached, even specific objects that you can choose to give away or physically remove yourself from. Being physically removed from something does not equate to giving it up – if it did, losing something dear would not entail suffering. The suffering of loss is not because of the absence of something, but because it is not given up. Equally, the pain of loss always fades sooner or later, without implying that there is any less internal attachment, which has just shifted from one thing to another, delighting here instead of there.

This should on no account be taken to mean that there is no need for physical separation from sensuality. What it does imply is that the degree of physical separation that is needed is no more and no less than what is outlined by the eight precepts, and that even this physical separation is, though necessary, not in itself a sufficient condition for relinquishing acquisition on the level that would free you[142].

The way of life of a monk, having gone forth, is the lifestyle that is shaped by the decision to live physically separate from engagement with the pleasures and concerns of the world. One should not be keeping this or that precept *because* of being a monk; rather, it is primarily the choice to *not* live in accordance with preference and comfort that makes somebody a monk. This way of living is what the precepts outline, and what the livelihood of a bhikkhu is meant to support.

*5. "The world is unstable and swept away.*

*The world is shelterless and without a protector.*

*The world is without what is one's own, one must go on having left all behind.*

*The world is incomplete, insatiate, the slave of craving.*

*"Great king, these are the four summaries of the Dhamma that have been taught by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully enlightened. Knowing and seeing and hearing them, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."*

*MN 82*

To contemplate and start seeing the confining nature of household life is not a very complex or intellectually taxing thing; but it is likely to be uneasy, especially if a person's starting point is undeveloped in virtue and honesty. Most people who have the aim of practicing the dhamma begin with at least a grain of the correct recognition, which is not about finding out something new, but rather admitting to yourself certain very obvious things that everyone already knows, but habitually distracts themselves from.

How do you know that anything is a comfort zone for you to begin with, even the most trivial? The only way to find a comfort zone is through the presence of potential anxiety at its periphery, where there is the possibility of its being threatened or being forced to step outside it. Every comfort zone is inherently

committing to anything can be a comfort zone for some. Company is a comfort zone for those who fear loneliness, but solitude can be a comfort zone for those who are insecure and anxious around others. Activity is a comfort zone for the restless, and inactivity is a comfort zone for the lazy. For someone set on doing everything their own way, being told what to do and having to obey an authority is uncomfortable, while for someone who takes comfort in rules and duties, questioning the rules and thinking for themselves is equally frightening. Wherever there is the pressure of greed, aversion and distraction, there is a comfort zone.

[142] Those who seek to justify non-abandonment of the world, sometimes not even keeping the precepts, often resort to the point that ultimately a person's external surroundings and possessions make no difference as long as they are detached. But the very fact that this is invariably used to justify *not* giving things up, rather than the alternative, is evidence that it does indeed make a difference. If it were to truly make no difference to you, you would have no problem with giving things up, and thus no reason to justify not doing so. Obviously, certain things cannot be given up without risk to life or health; food being the obvious example, which is why the instruction is to engage with it *only* for that reason. Furthermore, there are certain physical behaviours that are simply not possible to do without mental attachment involved (sexuality, killing, lying, stealing, deliberate self-intoxication), and therefore to suggest that one could give up the mental attachment without giving up these physical behaviours is literally like saying you could dry and season a tree branch while having it produce and ripen fruit at the same time. (See MN 22).

unstable, and involves a corresponding pressure and compulsion to do things for the sake of remaining within it. The less you turn a blind eye to these – again, quite obvious – aspects of that which is your home, the less you will be able to feel at home in it, whether or not you are aiming to go from home to homelessness.

This does not mean that you must be incessantly plagued with existential anxiety and dread, such that if ever you happen to feel pleasant or neutral, it means you must be doing something wrong. It means only that if you are actively seeking to *avoid* whatever anxiety and dread does arise here – that would indeed be doing something wrong. That is why this reflection necessarily goes hand in hand with refraining from acting in ways that support the distraction from it, and fuel the intoxication with it; namely those actions motivated by greed, by aversion or by careless indolence and distraction. It is impossible to act out in these ways while maintaining the perspective outlined above, and even if the acting out is not very frequent, it will still impede any real clarity from developing in this regard. On the other hand, even if you do not try to deliberately contemplate the nature of household life, simply refusing to give in to actions that you know are unwholesome will unfailingly expose whatever you are taking as a comfort zone, and undermine it at the same time.

6. Supposing you are recognising the instability of your home life, and are able to bear the whatever degree of unease this might engender without immediately resorting to covering it up. What do you do next?

The almost inevitable tendency here is to treat the 'practice of dhamma' as something else that comes 'after' this – as an answer to it, that ends up being done at the expense of it. This is very natural, because that recognition is universally the direction in which nobody wants to look and everyone wants to escape. But it is also exactly where the practice not only begins, but how it progresses and where it ends. So the answer to the question of what to do next is, in the broadest terms, 'not forget about it.'

*7. The one of broad wisdom has indeed found*

*The opening amidst confinement,*

*The Buddha who discovered jhāna,*

*The withdrawn chief bull, the sage."*

*"Even amidst confinement they find it,*

*The Dhamma for the attainment of Nibbāna—*

*Those who have acquired mindfulness,*

*Those perfectly well composed.*

*SN 2.7*

The words 'confinement' and 'opening' translate 'sambādha' and 'okāsa', which are the same words that appear in the standard description quoted above of a householder deciding to go forth. This is not incidental, as should be obvious at this point. As noted above, leaving home to become a monk is not in itself the escape from the confinement of household life. Leaving the worldly home is, rather, done for the sake of uncovering and bringing to light the more fundamental situation that all who live are taking as 'home' by default; namely this living body and the mind it is paired with.

8. Every instruction that was given to monks by the Buddha is for the sake of maintaining awareness and perspective in regard to the extent and nature of this 'comfort zone' of one's own body and senses; deactivating the activities that fuel one's dependence on it, and composing the mind within it. But it's important to realise that training on this level is only applicable when you are already able to not rely on coarser and more specific comfort zones, whether those pertaining to the world or to the life of a monk[143]. There is a reason why every description of the practice of recollectedness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) states that it is done on the basis of 'dispelling longing and sorrowing in regard to the world.'

[143]Which is exactly why such practices are always addressed to monks in the suttas, never to laypeople. And even monks are often specifically told to develop virtue and restraint before practicing mindfulness of the body. (See SN 47.3)

If this is not sufficiently developed, then it will almost certainly be quite hard to see how, say, recollection of breathing would pertain to or come under the same line of thinking in regard to comfort zones and their instability that I have been outlining as the foundation of the entire training. For this reason, if a person puts the cart before the horse, and tries to use the practices addressed to someone who has given up lay life as a shortcut to bypass the awkward work of abandoning lay life themselves, they will not only misunderstand and misrepresent those practices, but in doing so will lose sight of whatever thread of right reflection they might have otherwise been developing[144].

This does not mean that 'only monks can practice mindfulness of breathing'. What it does mean is that you need to be seeing household life as crowded and dusty and acting in accordance with this recognition; not forgetting about it, not acting out of the habitual pressure and anxiety that inevitably arises without the usual distractions from it, training yourself to relinquish it – and only then would mindfulness of the body and of breathing naturally make sense in a way that does not at all compromise the extent of 'homelessness' that you have already developed. Recollection of breathing is nothing but the direct way to undermine any sense of having a home within your own body, and what makes it impossible to depend on anything in the world that requires the body to be there beforehand – that is to say, anything in the world.

9. As was already briefly mentioned above: when it comes to your own home and situation that you generally take for granted, the less you turn a blind eye to the uncertain and unstable aspects of it that are generally left out of the picture, the less you will be able to carelessly regard it as your own, or to feel really 'at home' in it.

Initially this is bound to feel uneasy. That is why it is called 'confinement,' and that is why you need to develop the ability to withstand whatever anxiety arises on account of that recognition. But it is important to emphasise that it is not this instability or homelessness-amidst-home that is painful, but only the desire and attachment that you are unknowingly activating in regard to it. This is what is uncovered through restraint and the correct lines of reflection.

So the practice is not to just grit your teeth and withstand the pain waiting for the 'opening' to suddenly reveal itself out of nowhere and release you. It is to learn to discern this layer of active involvement and stop fuelling it. The same homelessness amidst-that-which-was-home, which is what *dukkha* is from the point of view of desire and attachment to it, is Nibbana when that desire and attachment is fully relinquished.

*There are, bhikkhus, these three kinds of intoxication. What three? Intoxication with youth, intoxication with health, and intoxication with life.* ******An uninstructed worldling, intoxicated with youth, engages in misconduct by body, speech, and mind*******. With the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in the lower world, in hell.* ******An uninstructed worldling, intoxicated with health, engages in misconduct by body, speech, and mind.******* With the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in the lower world, in hell.* ******An uninstructed worldling, intoxicated with life, engages in misconduct by body, speech, and mind.****** *With the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in the lower world, in hell.*

"******Intoxicated with youth, a bhikkhu gives up the training and reverts to the lower life; or intoxicated with health, he gives up the training and reverts to the lower life; or intoxicated with life, he gives up the training and reverts to the lower life.******

"*Worldlings subject to illness,*

*old age, and death, are disgusted*

*[by other people] who exist*

*in accordance with their nature.*

[144]This point is evidenced by the wide variety of current misrepresentations of such instructions, which reduce them to something that not only does not intrinsically require the reflections described above as a necessary basis, but is actually prohibitive of it. It is simply not possible to recollect the fact of living within something that is a comfort zone for you, together with all the uneasy possibilities and risks that this implies in the background of it, while intently focusing on following sensations of breathing in one's body, for example; or trying to not think about anything at all and just let each and every thought drift past.

*"If I were to become disgusted*

*with beings who have such a nature,*

*that would not be proper for me*

*since I too have the same nature.*

"******While I was dwelling thus,******

******having known the state without acquisitions,**********

******I overcame all intoxications—**********

******intoxication with health,**********

******with youth, and with life—**********

******having seen security in renunciation.**********

******"Zeal then arose in me**********

******as I clearly saw nibbāna.**********

******Now I am incapable**********

******of indulging in sensual pleasures.**********

******Relying on the spiritual life,**********

******never will I turn back."**********

*AN 3.37*

## Un-opposing the world (notes on mettā)

*by Sister Medhini*

> *so mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catthaṃ . iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjena pharitvā viharati*
>
> He lives with one direction pervaded by a mind endowed with friendliness, likewise the second, the third and the fourth. So above, below, across and in all directions, everywhere, he lives with the entire world pervaded by a mind endowed with friendliness – great, exalted and immeasurable, without enmity, without ill-will.
> -MN 7

This passage should be seen as a description of the *nature* of a mind of friendliness. That is, mettā is of a nature to be boundless; to pervade the whole world in all directions without limit. And so any notion of that mind established in mettā needing to direct active effort towards being friendly in regard to particular persons or things is inapplicable. The development of a mind of friendliness *is* the development of a boundless mind.

The description in fact makes no mention of other people, and this is because the purpose of dwelling in mettā (and the other brahmavihāras) is not to live in harmony with others, or to have pleasant thoughts about others. It is in fact totally unconcerned with others. Rather, the purpose is developing the way of living and thinking and seeing the world that does not carry the basis for ill-will or enmity in any shape or to any extent. That is why the mind that has learned the meaning of dwelling in mettā and become established in it to the extent necessary would become incapable of ill-will; enmity becomes literally inconceivable.[145]

[145] I have developed and cultivated the freedom of the mind by friendliness, made it my vehicle and basis, carried it out, consolidated it, and properly undertaken it, yet ill will still remains, taking over my mind.' He should be told: 'Not so! Do not speak thus. Do not misrepresent the Blessed One; for it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would certainly not speak in such a way. It is impossible and inconceivable, friend, that one might develop and cultivate the freedom of the mind by friendliness, make

The basis of enmity is far broader than one particular mental state, although the state of mind of anger or ill-will is of course the most obvious symptom of it. It encompasses one's whole mode of being; in other words, the capacity for enmity in one's experience is a measure for one's capacity to suffer. It is obvious that becoming free from this can only come from first uncovering and understanding that basis of enmity, which we all end up carrying around with us unless we make the necessary effort to undo it.

Although the purpose of mettā is nothing to do with others, ill-will on the other hand *is* very much concerned with others, or more precisely, with certain orientations and attitudes that infect and affect the whole framework of one's experience of others. Whatever interaction or relationship with others one might have; pleasing or unpleasing, towards love or towards hate; relies on and can only come through that same framework that allows for both. But people generally live entangled with other people and dependent on them physically and emotionally, which means that the framework of others in the most general sense remains perpetually covered up by this entanglement and engagement. As long as it remains covered up, not understood and unabandoned, there is no possibility of a mind of non-enmity.[146]

Therefore the immediate and basic work to be done by a person who wants to go above enmity, is to separate himself from others in the coarse and obvious ways. To give up, that is, the habits of relying on and using them for safety, pleasure and comfort.[147]

'Others', in the most general sense, as a direction that is always present in any experience (regardless of who or what one regards as pertaining to it at the time), is what practically speaking represents a domain that is characterised by uncertainty and unavailability.

By this I mean that while one can look to other people for what one wants, or can try to help them or affect them in different ways, what makes it possible for them to, for example, either help you or hurt you, to love you or hate you, to react in one way or another in any given situation, is utterly beyond reach. This is the direction from which any threat to one's existence is felt to originate. It is equally the direction from which the greatest and best blessing or good fortune might come. 'Others', in short, means 'there's no saying which way it will go.' No matter how much someone has managed to gain a sense of security and familiarity within certain groups or communities, even if one were to become the ruler of the entire world, there would always remain 'something other' that one has no access to. When it is not ignored, it is what is immediately known as unavailable and by definition impossible to own.

The foundation of enmity can be boiled down to the standpoint and orientation of *opposition* in regard to the domain of others as a whole. This is in common not only to all forms of enmity, fear and ill-will, but equally sensual attraction and emotional dependency.

One can feel opposed to this or that particular person or thing when regarding it specifically as a threat or adversary, but the opposition as it is meant here, as a foundation for living within the sphere where enmity applies, is based in one's internal relationship with the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and imagination; whatever is seen, heard, sensed and imagined; and whatever is felt – agreeable, disagreeable, neither-agreeable-nor-disagreeable – in regard to what is seen, heard, sensed and imagined. It is a matter of, quite literally, 'taking a side' when it comes to the totality of this.

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it one's vehicle and basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet ill will could still remain, taking over one's mind. There is no such possibility. For this, friend, is the escape from ill will, namely, the freedom of the mind by friendliness.' AN 6.13

[146] 'People are bound by people/ for people depend on people./ People are hurt by people/ and people hurt other people. /Then what is the benefit of people for you,/ or what is created by people? / Having hurt many people/you should leave these people and go.' Thag. 2.15 (Reading 'gaccha taṁ = tvaṁ' in the second last line.)

[147] It might be worth pointing out that running away from everybody and living in a cave is not the way to do this. Physical seclusion *is* useful and necessary to some extent; but simply dwelling alone in and of itself does not teach you how to 'not delight in company.' The purpose of physical seclusion should be seen as training oneself in living 'as one who is alone' even amongst others, and therefore too much of seclusion at the wrong time, and especially undertaken for the wrong reasons, can result in obscuring the problem rather than addressing it. Independence of others is primarily achieved through training in authenticity, morality and renunciation, and by accepting responsibility for one's choices and their consequences. If the relevance of this to ill-will and anger is not obvious, it will become so as one starts actually putting it into practice. But one point that can be mentioned immediately is that this foundational training obviously includes abstaining from acting or speaking from irritation, resentment or other forms of ill-will. In doing so one will already be giving up a whole sphere of enmity that relies on such outward expressions of it for its existence. If one is putting this first and taking it seriously, it will, in the first place, be relatively easy to see where further work of internally disentangling oneself from others applies; and in the second place, the mind will be strong enough to do it. In other words, the following paragraphs will be applicable.

This means, to put this as concisely as possible for the moment, that when it comes to certain aspects of this totality – most fundamentally the sense faculties and what is felt in dependence on them – one is habitually looking past their facticity, towards what one takes for granted as an opposing object, separate and at a distance. And in this way one is implicitly taking the side of the senses – that is, regarding them as personal and holding them dear.

To put this in different words: when something a person sees is pleasing, he habitually 'sticks' to it and welcomes it, while forgetting the seeing of it. When something he sees is displeasing, he habitually rejects and resists it, equally looking past the seeing of it. The same applies to what is heard, smelled, tasted, touched and imagined: either way, whether rejecting or welcoming these things, one is regularly accepting, taking for granted and reinforcing the direction of emphasis that these experiences naturally offer: 'this is the source of my pain'; 'this is the source of my pleasure.' It is in this way that he ends up continually looking past the phenomenon of pain or pleasure as such, and holding *whatever* is felt dearly as his own, whether as 'my suffering' or 'my happiness'. By the same token, the direction of that which he is welcoming or rejecting is constantly being placed and maintained by default on the side of the 'other', that is the opposition.

For as long as someone is living in this way, unknowingly holding the domain of 'others' at a distance and cultivating opposition to it as a whole – he cannot recognise the fact that that entire dimension of 'otherness', together with its undermining and threatening nature and its absolute unreachability, is bound with and inconceivable apart from that very seeing of it that he takes to be 'his' seeing, the hearing he takes to be 'his' hearing, the imagining he takes to be 'his' imagining, and the feeling he takes to be 'his' feeling.[148]

In other words, the unavailability of 'others' as a direction, is what reveals the unavailability of the seeing of them, hearing of them, sensing of them, cognizing of them: one's 'own' senses and feelings in dependence on them belong entirely to the domain of others. And when one can be affected, threatened or enticed by others, it is because one is taking up *these* complete others and holding them as one's own.[149]

By the very fact of taking these complete others as mine, one is at the same time viscerally opposing all that is 'other'. Taking the side of the senses, and taking the side of whatever is felt in dependence on them, entails by definition engaging in a total and absolute resistance to and denial of the whole nature of the domain of others[150]. The dissonance that results from maintaining this contradiction in the heart of one's existence, while doing everything to get away from it apart from looking at it and undoing it, is one way of describing what *dukkha* is in its core. And it is because of this self-generated conflict with the nature of everything- not because of the domain of others being inaccessible and uncertain as it actually is – that it threatens one, oppresses one, and remains as a basis for enmity and ill-will.

So, for as long as a person is regarding his senses and feelings as his personal property, it is impossible not to regard others as *potential* enemies, even if they are not currently seen as his enemies at the time. For the same reason, if one abandons the gratuitous and contradictory taking the side of what does not belong to him, there cannot be any ground for opposition in regard to others, regardless of what they might do. Enmity or ill-will simply cannot apply there. Neither, for that matter, can love or intimacy.

> On seeing a form with the eye, when it is pleasing he is impassioned with it, when it is unpleasing he is averse to it. He dwells without established memory of the body, with a limited mind. And he does not understand the freedom of the mind and the freedom of wisdom as it is, wherein

[148] See SN 35.68: 'Venerable sir, it is said, 'the world, the world.' In what way, venerable sir, might there be the world or the description of the world?" "Where there is the eye, Samiddhi, where there are sights, eye-consciousness, things to be cognized by eye-consciousness, there the world exists or the description of the world. "Where there is the ear … the imagination, where there are images, imagination-consciousness, things to be cognized by imagination-consciousness, there the world exists or the description of the world.' Also SN 35.116: 'That in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world—this is called the world in the Noble One's Discipline. And what, friends, is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world? The eye is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world..'

[149] Here, monk, a monk has heard: "All things are not worth depending on." When a monk has heard this: "All things are not worth depending on," he directly understands the totality. Having directly understood the totality, he fully understands the totality. Having fully understood the totality, he sees all signs as other. He sees the eye as other, sights as other, eye-consciousness as other, eye-contact as other, and whatever arises in dependence on eye-contact, agreeable, disagreeable, neither-agreeable-nor-disagreeable, he sees that as other….(similarly for the other senses.) SN 35.80

[150] This, by the way, applies equally to sensuality as it does to ill-will, both of which rely on opposition to others and denial of the nature of others. This is why abandoning ill-will implies abandoning sensuality as well.

> those evil, harmful things cease without remainder. Engaged as he is in favouring and opposing, whatever feeling he feels, – whether pleasant, unpleasant, neither unpleasant nor unpleasant – he delights in that feeling, accepts it and remains holding to it.
> – MN 38

The practical meaning of "dwelling without established memory of the body" in this context is that while this person is impassioned with seeing something pleasing, or averse to something displeasing, he only sees *what* he sees, and forgets the physical 'seeing' of it. (The same goes for all of the other senses, including imagination.)

This apparently insignificant detail, which does not make any material or measurable difference to one's experience, is nonetheless the difference between going with the grain of samsara, and going against it. It is by repeatedly and habitually looking past the 'seeing' while only seeing what one sees, that one becomes opposed to it again and again, and keeps taking the side of the eye that sees, which is the basis for taking up whatever one feels in regard to it.[151] The mind in this way remains bound by that feeling, which again is how it is bound to opposition and enmity, as well as to birth, death, pain, sorrow, lamentation and despair.

> Now delight in feelings is taking-up (upādana). With his taking-up as condition, being; with being as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.
> – MN 38

If one, having understood this, does not forget this container of the bodily 'seeing' (and likewise for all other senses) regardless of *what* he is seeing, that is how one begins to establish the correct memory of the body while being within it. Understanding the meaning of this, and training in it throughout one's days and nights, means learning to undo the habit of unknowingly taking the side of the body of senses, and whatever is felt in dependence on it.

> And what, bhikkhus, is the nourishment for the arising of unarisen ill-will, and for the increase and development of arisen ill-will? There is, bhikkhus, the sign for opposition (*paṭighanimittā*). Repeatedly attending that unreflexively – this is the nourishment for the arising of unarisen ill-will, and for the increase and development of arisen ill-will And what, bhikkhus, is the starvation of the arising of unarisen ill-will, and of the increase and development of arisen ill-will? There is, bhikkhus, the freedom of the mind by friendliness (*mettācetovimutti*). Repeatedly attending that reflexively – this is the starvation of the arising of unarisen ill-will, and for the increase and development of arisen ill-will.
> – SN 46.51

'The sign for opposition' (*paṭighanimittā*) and 'the freedom of the mind by friendliness' (*mettācetovimutti*) – these are not to be seen as two entirely separate things that arise independently. Wherever there is the sign for opposition, or to put it another way, the 'offer' of opposition – there is simultaneously the *potential* for the freedom of the mind by friendliness. In other words, that possibility of non-opposition without limit or measure is what is *obscured* by attending wrongly to a situation that naturally 'points' to opposition.

Attending wrongly, unreflexively (ayoniso) to that which 'points' one in the direction of a given opposition, simply means taking this 'sign' at face value and its given emphasis on 'this or that *other thing*' as the source of one's problem (i.e. the source of pain).

Attending rightly, reflexively (yoniso) to the *same* situation with the same significance, means simply *not accepting* at face value its natural pointing towards 'the opposition', while the pressure towards accepting it is there, and not before or after. This is different from totally denying that significance, pretending it is not there, or refusing to acknowledge it. The point is that there is no need to 'do' anything more than *not* take for granted that natural direction of emphasis that points towards 'something' as the cause of the pain one is feeling.

[151] More precisely, agreeability or disagreeability becomes felt as my pain and my pleasure 'in' that body that is being overlooked and taken for granted: in other words, taking the side of the senses makes one liable to be contacted by sights and sounds and to feel pain and pleasure *there* – it 'lands on' that side that one is taking.

This is also the place to mention that what practically constitutes 'the sign for opposition' on any given occasion (i.e. what it 'points towards') vs the extent of what can become included in the personal side (that on behalf of which one becomes opposed to something else), is not at all fixed; and is determined by how it is regarded and which aspects of the situation are wrongly emphasised and attended; not by their content. Even other people and their feelings can become included into the side that is taken up, on whose behalf one acts towards what is against them; and conversely even the image of one's own self can be taken as the enemy towards which the mind expresses and carries very real ill-will.

An example that might help to illustrate this: suppose a person is feeling displeasure on being given a harsh reprimand or criticism by somebody else. He could accept at face value the 'sign for opposition' that points towards the person who dared criticise him; whether fairly or unfairly, as the source of his own displeasure on hearing it, and that is how he would be implicitly 'taking the side' of that displeasure while becoming opposed to the other person. This is the basis for further resentment towards them; irritation or irrational self-justification, etc. But in the experience of being criticised or reprimanded by somebody else, *their* displeasure or disappointment is also manifested as such. And this 'external' displeasure, if it is what becomes the focus and basis of unreflexive attention, can equally become what is taken up as a standpoint for opposition. In other words, there is also the 'sign of opposition' in this situation that points towards 'your behaviour, your action, your thought' as the source of another's pain[152]; and accepting this at face value is how someone can become opposed to and angry with himself 'on behalf of' the feelings of others.[153]

Which of these potential directions one's mind will be inclined to take at any given time depends to some extent on the situation, as well as on the tendencies of an individual. The point is that *anything* that is seen, heard, sensed and imagined can equally become the basis of opposition: the fact that a thought is of 'myself' does not prevent it from being *regarded* as an enemy and in this sense an 'other;' and on the other hand even something that is manifestly and self-evidently outside of one's domain does not prevent it from being taken as an intimate association. In brief, all signs for opposition are equally groundless and all forms of intimacy are equally gratuitous.

Not accepting such sign of opposition at face value, without denying or further interfering with them[154], is how one does not lose sight of the broader perspective in regard to it. And that 'bigger picture' is in itself what can eventually become known as the freedom of the mind by friendliness, by repeatedly undoing and not accepting the given emphasis towards opposition.[155]

This does not feel like the friendliness one is used to, which is always 'in relation to' enmity, which depends

[152]The same principle of taking up the side of other people's feelings can of course also lead towards enmity in regard to other things that are 'further' opposed to them. One example of this being taken to extremes would be when people, on hearing news reports of injustice and oppression of people in a distant country which they cannot point to on a map, nevertheless feel the pain of that whole nation of individuals and take it upon themselves. Because of unknowingly taking the side of this pain, they also take up the opposition of the oppressors and willingly volunteer to fight in a war against them.

[153]The only way that anger or harshness of others directed at one can become felt internally (i.e., that one can be affected by it) is by the mind accepting it and 'replicating' it on its own, so to speak. This of course does not only apply to 'self-hatred' specifically, but becoming affected by the feelings and actions of others in any manner. See SN 7.2: ' "What do you think, brahmin, do your friends and colleagues, kinsmen, relatives or guests come to see you?" "Sometimes they do, Master Gotama." "And what do you think, brahmin, do you offer them cooked food or uncooked food, or something to taste?" "Sometimes I do, Master Gotama." "But if they, brahmin, do not accept, to whom does that then belong?" "If they, Master Gotama, do not accept, that still belongs to us." "Just so, brahmin, when you abuse us who are not abusing, try to anger us who are unangered, quarrel with us who are not quarrelling, we do not accept that from you. It still belongs to you, brahmin! It still belongs to you." '

[154]For example: falling into replacing one source of opposition with another ('It's not his fault, it's *my* fault'); sorting out in one's mind exactly who was wrong and who was right according to some external standard; trying to replace an 'irrational' thought ('I feel like so-and-so might hate me') with a rationalised version of it ('I am imagining things, they don't hate me') trying to prevent the displeasure one felt from arising, or thinking it 'shouldn't' arise; replacing unpleasant thoughts with pleasant thoughts, practicing forgiveness, etc. All of these might end up being done when one has no other recourse, and if they are the only alternative to acting out of coarse anger, it is still better than the former; but fundamentally all such interferences assume the same basis of opposition and are done on top of it; and thus cannot possibly bring one closer to understanding or undermining it.

[155]It should hopefully go without saying that all of the above is utterly inapplicable for as long as somebody is doing actions with body, speech and to some extent with thought, which are based on already accepting the sign towards opposition; and already mentally favouring or resisting whatever is seen, heard, imagined, etc. This acceptance is what practically translates to being 'directed' towards specific actions and behaviours of the unwholesome variety. Therefore the root of opposition 'below' this, can only become discernible when one is withdrawn from physically engaging in those behaviours. For almost everyone, withdrawing from this constitutes the vast majority of the work.

on intimacy and on people. (And for this reason, if one does not stick to developing it to the sufficient degree in spite of its not feeling 'right' according to what he expects, he will not recognise it for what it is.) Mettā is, rather, the ultimate non-enmity amidst enmity: while the conflicts and hostilities inevitably go on within the domain of others, the mind that, through training, has been withdrawn from both entanglement and opposition in regard to the totality of that domain, sees its full extent and is without a stake in any part of it, *cannot help* but dwell with non-enmity that is truly without limit and that pervades every direction.

> *susukhaṃ vata jīvāma, verinesu averino. verinesu manussesu, viharāma averino.*
>
> So very happily we live! – without enmity amidst enemies. Among mankind in enmity, rid of enmity we dwell.
> -Dhp 197
>
> *sa sabbadhammesu visenibhūto, yaṃ kiñci diṭṭhaṃ va sutaṃ mutaṃ vā. tameva dassiṃ vivaṭaṃ carantaṃ, kenīdha lokasmi vikappayeyya.*
>
> In regard to all things he has become unopposed/ disassociated – Whatever seen, heard or thought. Living transparently seeing like this, By what in the world could one define him?
> -Snp 4.4

## On the Simile of the Wet Sticks

***By Sister Medhini***

> "It occurred to me, Prince: 'Whenever ascetics or brahmins of the past felt harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, the utmost was this; there is no more than this. And whenever ascetics or brahmins of the future will feel harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, the utmost will be this; there is no more than this. And whatever ascetics or brahmins now feel harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, the utmost is this; there is no more than this. And yet, through the practice of these severe austerities, I have not achieved anything beyond the mundane – any knowledge and vision worthy of a noble one. Could there be another path to awakening?'
>
> "Then, Prince, three similes came to me, not learned before, not heard before.
>
> "Suppose there were a wet piece of wood, full of sap and lying in the water. And a man were to come along taking an upper fire-stick – 'I will start a fire; I will generate heat.'
> What do you think, Prince: would that man, having taken the upper fire-stick and rubbing it on the wet piece of wood, full of sap and lying in the water, be able to start a fire and generate heat?"
>
> "No indeed, Bhante. Why is that? Because the piece of wood is wet and full of sap, and moreover it is lying in the water; that man would be heir to only weariness and frustration."
>
> "Just in this way, Prince, whatever ascetics and brahmins do not live withdrawn from sensuality in body, and in whom desire for sensuality, love for sensuality, preoccupation with sensuality, thirst for sensuality, and zeal for sensuality are internally not well abandoned and thoroughly calmed: even if those good ascetics and brahmins feel harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, they are incapable of knowledge, vision, and unsurpassed enlightenment; and even if they do not feel harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, they are incapable of knowledge, vision, and unsurpassed enlightenment.
>
> "That was the first simile that came to me, not learned before, not heard before.
>
> "Furthermore, Prince, a second simile came to me, not learned before, not heard before: Suppose there were a wet piece of wood, full of sap and lying on the ground far from water. And a man were to come along, taking an upper fire-stick – 'I will start a fire; I will generate heat.'
> What do you think, Prince: would that man, having taken the upper fire-stick and rubbing it on

the wet piece of wood, full of sap and lying on the ground far from water, be able to start a fire and generate heat?"

"No indeed, Bhante. Why is that? Because however far it may be lying from the water, that piece of wood is still wet and full of sap; that man would be heir to only weariness and frustration."

"Just in this way, Prince, whatever ascetics and brahmins live withdrawn from sensuality in body, yet in whom desire for sensuality, love for sensuality, preoccupation with sensuality, thirst for sensuality, and zeal for sensuality are internally not well abandoned and thoroughly calmed: even if those good ascetics and brahmins feel harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, they are incapable of knowledge, vision, and unsurpassed enlightenment; and even if they do not feel harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, they are incapable of knowledge, vision, and unsurpassed enlightenment.

"That was the second simile that came to me, not learned before, not heard before.

"Furthermore, Prince, a third simile came to me, not learned before, not heard before: Suppose there were a dry and sapless piece of wood, lying on the ground far from water. And a man were to come along taking an upper fire-stick – 'I will start a fire; I will generate heat.' What do you think, Prince: would that man, having taken the upper fire-stick and rubbing it on the dry, sapless piece of wood, lying on the ground far from water, be able to start a fire and generate heat?"

"Yes, Bhante. Why is that? Because the piece of wood is dry and sapless, and moreover it is lying on the ground far from water."

"Just in this way, Prince, whatever ascetics and brahmins live withdrawn from sensuality in body, and in whom desire for sensuality, love for sensuality, preoccupation with sensuality, thirst for sensuality, and zeal for sensuality is internally well abandoned and thoroughly calmed: even if those good ascetics and brahmins feel harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, they are capable of knowledge, vision, and ultimate enlightenment; and even if they do not feel harsh, severe, piercing, and painful feelings through their own exertion, they are capable of knowledge, vision, and ultimate enlightenment.

"That was the third simile that came to me, not learned before, not heard before.

"It occurred to me, Prince: 'I remember sitting in the shade of a rose-apple tree, while my father the Sakyan was busy, and withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unwholesome things, with thinking and pondering, and with joy and happiness born of seclusion, I dwelled having established myself in the first meditation. Could that be the path to awakening?'[156]
And following that memory, I had the recognition: '*That* is the path to awakening!'
I thought: 'Now why am I afraid of that pleasure which is entirely apart from the pleasure of sensuality, apart from unwholesome things?' I thought: 'I am no longer afraid of that pleasure, which is entirely apart from the pleasure of sensuality and apart from unwholesome things.' "
– MN 36

In the Pāli versions of MN 85 and MN 36, the simile of the wet sticks occurs *before* the Bodhisatta began his extreme ascetic practices. In the Sanskrit parallel of this account in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, it occurs after he had already undergone them. Not only does this make far more sense in the narrative of the sutta as a whole – the full weight and significance of the simile only appears when considered in this particular context, and this has some very real practical implications.

I want to make it clear at the outset that I am not interested in debating which of these texts or traditions is earlier or more authoritative. This is not a textual or historical issue; it is a practical one regarding what exactly constitutes the path to freedom from suffering, and how that path can be realised. The Sanskrit

[156] In spite of traditional accounts, there is no indication that the Buddha was a child at this time. In the *Saṅghabhedavastu* (Vol. I, pp. 76–77), the account is that the Bodhisatta had been sent to oversee some farm work by his father, and was struck with dread and sense of urgency on seeing the affliction of the people and animals at work. It was with this same sense of urgency that he then sat down under the rose-apple tree, his mind turned away from sensuality.

parallel provides a starting point for thinking about this, but all that follows would hold true even if there were no parallel.

The meaning of the simile is very clear and straightforward. Its purpose is, firstly, to illustrate that it is impossible to arrive at clarity of understanding or knowledge of truth without being thoroughly withdrawn from sensuality, and without having calmed the desire internally for sensuality. Secondly, it is to show that going beyond this in creating self-inflicted pain for its own sake is redundant and has no benefit. Every section of the simile repeats that the dryness of the sticks is the factor that determines the capacity for awakening, and self-mortification makes no difference.

A further implication that can be gathered from this is that engaging in a practice of self-mortification towards the goal of awakening would not only be useless, but would in its own way constitute an obstacle. This is because doing so would necessarily come through the view, or at least the hope, that this activity, as opposed to *merely* withdrawing from sensual actions, words, thoughts, and inclinations, could somehow contribute to higher knowledge and understanding.

This would imply a failure to understand the principle that the simile of the wet sticks illustrates: that knowledge and vision is obscured by one's own *wilful engagement* in sense desires, and one's own emotional stickiness in regard to that state of sensual existence. Whatever the extent of that stickiness and dependence on sense pleasures that a given individual starts with, is not there because of failing to put himself through arbitrary forms of self-inflicted discomfort. It is there because he is actively maintaining it through choices and actions by body, speech and mind. Although the process of withdrawal from this engagement will also inevitably be uncomfortable for one who has been dependent on it, there is all the difference in the world between pain of *withdrawal* from dependency, and pain upon which one *becomes dependent* as a means of purification. It is the latter that is totally without benefit.

It is quite implausible that having thought along these lines, the Bodhisatta would *then* go on to engage in self-mortification practices regardless.

Even more importantly, the weight and significance of the similes increases in the context of their occurring as a consequence of the Bodhisatta's recognition of the total futility of the ascetic practices he had been engaging in. To understand this point, it is necessary to think in some depth about the significance of such recognition and what is required to arrive at it.

It might be imagined that anyone who were to spend long enough engaging in some practice that is clearly not leading to the goal it is supposed to, would eventually arrive at the same conclusion that the Bodhisatta did in this situation. The reality, however, is almost the exact opposite. Investment in any practice towards liberation, no matter how painful from an external standpoint, gathers its own momentum and internally becomes a place of safety in itself. As such, it becomes exceedingly difficult to relinquish, even for one who might be well aware that he has not reached his intended aim.

For a person in such a position, the natural implication of giving up what they have been doing, and admitting that *all of this was for nothing*, is that the goal they were striving for is also to be given up. In other words, giving up something that has become identified with "practice towards enlightenment", effectively means "returning to sensuality." It is impossible to entirely relinquish the extreme of self-mortification and just *happen* to stay there by circumstance, without falling back into the other extreme – for the simple reason that to do so requires one to remain entirely confined within the resulting doubt, lack of resolution, sense of failure and untetheredness, and *not* latch onto something else to fill that void. Even if there is someone (such as a Buddha) to tell you that this is in fact where you *should* stay, in spite of it feeling like the most unnatural and wrong thing to do, following that instruction requires significant authenticity and strength of mind. Without any such indication of a word of another, the fact that someone nonetheless does so to a sufficient degree and for a sufficient time for wisdom to arise through it, is what makes the arising of a Buddha miraculous.

It is in this context that the simile of the wet sticks arises and carries even more weight, as precipitated by the reflection: "I have not, through the practice of these severe austerities, achieved anything beyond the mundane, knowledge and vision worthy of a noble one. Could there be another path to awakening?"
It is very important to note that the similes (unlike the memory of jhāna which follows the line in the Pāli

sutta) do not immediately or directly *answer* this somewhat desperate question "could there be another path to awakening?" – the core of which is the even more universal dilemma that can be simply expressed as: "What on earth do I *do*?"

What the similes do reflect, in this context, is the recognition that
1) Regardless of what might or might not constitute the path to awakening, and even if there were to be no path at all to be found, returning to sensuality would be a separate action that carries no benefit and only harm.
2) Regardless of what exactly constitutes the specific path to awakening, sensuality *by definition* can only hinder it. As long as there is mental delight in sensuality (let alone actions, words and thoughts based on that delight), there cannot be knowledge, vision and clarity of insight any more than there can be fire and water in the same place at the same time.
3) The further confirmation that not only were these particular self-mortification practices futile; in its very nature self-mortification makes no difference towards the goal.

In short, the significance of the similes is that although one might still not know "what to do," it can still be clear what *not* to do: everything else is secondary to the dryness of the sticks, which is only accomplished by actually disengaging from sensual desires both physically and mentally.
It is at this point that it would make very natural sense for the Bodhisatta to recall a time in which his mind had already been thoroughly and entirely turned away from desire and sensuality, and to realise that this, in fact, is the path to awakening.

In other words, the most significant insight that this sutta describes is not actually that jhāna, even understood as this state of complete seclusion from desires, *is* the path to awakening in itself. (If abiding in jhāna alone were fully sufficient for awakening, the Bodhisatta's earlier experience of it should have resulted in him becoming the Buddha there and then.) The point, which is subtle and all too easily overlooked, is in the understanding of the value of withdrawal from desire, for its own sake.

This is also what distinguishes jhāna from the attainments the Buddha had already achieved under the ascetics Āḷāra Kalāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. The establishment of mind in the dimension of nothingness, or the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, most certainly also entails thorough withdrawal from sensuality; because in order to be established upon such a phenomenon, everything below, inferior or more particular than that phenomenon needs to be overcome. This includes sense pleasures of any kind. The difference in this case, however, is that although the same work to abandon sense pleasures is being done[157], it is done in virtue of looking towards and resting on a higher thing, with the emphasis on *that*. Although the mind's elevation above such desires will indeed entail genuine peace, such a person will inevitably regard the peace they experience as being rooted in that dimension, because of *its* elevation or loftiness. So, one who has abandoned sense pleasures on account of something else, will not be able to rightly recognise the benefit of withdrawal from that extent of desire in and of itself. Nevertheless, the factual dispassion for sensuality and development of composure that would be required to abide in these dimensions, is the very reason that these teachers were later said to have "little dust in their eyes".

In the same way, although the earlier dwelling in jhāna that the Buddha recollected did not result in awakening at the time, later after giving up his practice of self-mortification he was able to realise: "*This* is the path to awakening!"

The difference here is not in some "extra step" (which the sutta nowhere mentions) – it is the *understanding* of where the value of it is.

So, although the order and placement of the simile of the sticks and the memory of the first jhāna are comparatively minor details, their significance and implications are not; both for how we understand the work undergone by the Buddha, and, by extension, how we understand our own work toward the same goal.

[157] Note well that what is described here is very different from simply *replacing* one's usual sensual desires with something else, as can quite commonly be done through various forms of religious practice: by replacing worldly pleasures with love of God, meditative calm, or some equivalent. In such cases sensuality is not really being given up at all – the very same desire is merely being directed elsewhere and obscured, not tamed. And so if, for whatever reason, one were to lose one's faith in God (or otherwise lose that which has been standing in place of sensuality), those same sensual pleasures and desires would be right there waiting, and one could very well still go back to them.

Whatever might be the reason for the position of the simile in the Pāli, the result is that it can be quite easily overlooked and regarded as almost incidental – not significantly influencing the Bodhisatta's own actions before or after; certainly not the defining factor in opening the middle way. Instead, the seemingly fortuitous and circumstantial arising of a past memory of jhāna is what appears to have *truly* revealed the path to enlightenment. One who sees his own task in the same light can all too easily allow himself to regard the abandonment of sensuality itself as similarly incidental – despite the simile itself directly contradicting this – while expecting the true breakthrough to arise through something that simply *happens* to occur (perhaps after sufficient time spent engaging in some equally arbitrary practice).

But the simile of the wet sticks is the opposite of incidental. It reflects the very recognition of where the path to awakening is, and WHY it must be so. As the simile itself directly says, knowledge and vision depends on thorough disengagement from sensual desires. And the value of that disengagement is not something that can be understood by means of engagement and dependence, whether on pleasure or pain. It can only become apparent when all such options of engagement have been closed off and abandoned. In the Bodhisatta's case, this could only come about through the sheer exhaustion of all those options, and the refusal to totally forgo the goal of peace in spite of that exhaustion. If someone today wants to pursue the same goal, the principle is the same; but renunciation and disengagement can be directly trained, without wasting time in other pointless avenues. This is what the gradual training of the suttas describes.

## Light and Vision

***by Sister Medhini***

> "Here, Bhante, as we are dwelling diligent, ardent, and resolute, we are aware of light together with vision of images. And yet, before long, our light disappears with the vision of images, and we have not comprehended the cause."
>
> "Indeed, Anuruddha and friends, you should comprehend the cause. I too, Anuruddha and friends, before awakening, as an unawakened bodhisatta, was aware of light together with vision of images. And yet, before long, my light disappeared with the vision of images. It occurred to me: 'For what reason, on what basis, do my light and vision of images disappear?' It occurred to me: 'Doubt arose in me, and through doubt my composure fell away; with the falling of composure my light disappeared with the vision of images. So I will work in such a way that doubt does not arise in me again … inattention arose in me … sloth and laziness arose in me … fright arose in me … excitement arose in me … sluggishness arose in me … too-tight energy arose in me … too-slack energy arose in me … longing arose in me…varied perception arose in me … As I was dwelling diligent, ardent, and resolute, I was aware of light together with vision of images. And yet, before long, my light disappeared with the vision of images. It occurred to me: 'For what reason, on what basis, do my light and vision of images disappear?' It occurred to me: 'Over-contemplating of images arose in me, and through over-contemplating of images my composure fell away; with the falling of composure my light disappeared with the vision of images. So I will work in such a way that over-contemplating of images does not arise in me again.' "
> – MN 128

> There is, Vāseṭṭha, the occasion sooner or later when, after the passing of a long time, this world dissolves. While the world is dissolving, the majority of beings are tending in the direction of radiant gods. There, they are mind-made, nourished by joy; with light of their own, living in the sky, remaining lovely, and there they stay for a very long duration.
>
> There is, Vāseṭṭha, the occasion sooner or later when, after the passing of a long time, this world evolves. With the evolution of the world, the majority of beings, falling away from the radiant-body, come to this world. There they are mind-made, nourished by joy, with light of their own, living in the sky, remaining lovely, and there they stay for a very long duration.
>
> But at that time, Vāseṭṭha, it was watery in nature, intensely dark and gloomy. There was no discerning the sun and the moon, nor stars and constellations, nor day and night, nor female

and male; beings simply were reckoned as beings.

Then, for those beings at some time or other, after the passing of a very long time, a flavourful solid came to be laid over the water. It was just like a skin from the cooling of milk; that was how it appeared. It had a delightful colour, a delicious smell, a delicious flavour. Its colour was just like ghee or butter and just as delightful; its flavour was just like pure wild bee honey, and just as delicious.

Then, Vāseṭṭha, a certain being, reckless in character, thinking, "See now, just what might this be?", tasted the flavourful solid with their finger. As they tasted it, craving entered into them. Other beings too, getting the idea of that being and following along with it, tasted the flavourful solid with their fingers. As they tasted it, craving entered into them. Then, Vāseṭṭha, those beings went to partake of that flavourful solid, breaking off pieces of it with their hands.

When they went to partake of it and broke off pieces with their hands, then, for those beings, their own light disappeared. With the disappearance of their own light, the sun and the moon appeared. With the appearance of the sun and the moon, the stars and constellations appeared; with the appearance of the stars and constellations, day and night were discerned. When day and night were discerned, months and days were discerned. When months and days were discerned, seasons and years were discerned. To that extent, Vāseṭṭha, the world was evolved.
– DN 27

So happily we live, we who have nothing of ours. We will be nourished by joy, like the radiant gods.
– Dhp 200

To start from the ground up: all life is equally subject to the pressures and demands of elements. The potential to choose how to respond to those demands is the difference between vegetative organisms and conscious beings. Trees, for instance, modify their growth patterns in response to sunlight. But in the case of a tree, the nature of that response is, as far as we can tell from our point of view, absolute; unmediated by any possibility of choosing to do otherwise. Touch of sunlight directly and without exception translates to movement in the direction of the sunlight. For that very reason, that movement cannot properly be called "action," insofar as it is not a conscious or deliberate choice, but a pure reaction. And where conscious choice is absent or in abeyance, there can be no self-awareness, or even the ability to distinguish between one thing and another.

In the animal realm, there is at least some capacity for restraint and hence choice, although it is both limited and rarely exerted. Animals, for the overwhelming majority of the time, behave rather like trees in that they simply respond to what nature asks of them as quickly and directly as they can.

The scope of the human realm is wider. It is characterised by a certain baseline level of self-awareness, of which the most obvious symptom is speech. As humans, we can speak about doing something, or wanting to do something, without doing it. This already outlines a capacity for intentional restraint which is largely lacking in the animal realm.

At the same time, human life is rooted in the same organic matter as plant life that exists to grow and reproduce; and revolves, for the most part, around sensory experiences. The potential for self-awareness and restraint is generally used as little as possible and held in rather poor regard.

In the reverse direction from the "animalistic" mode of being with which many people will be familiar as a default state, there is *brahmacariya*: celibacy, the renunciate life or, literally, "living as gods."

In light of the above, we need not understand this term as wholly metaphorical. If the direction towards immersion in sense-desires is there, its extreme side emulating existence as an animal, so is, by the same token, the direction towards separation from sensuality that results in living and seeing as if through the eyes of the gods.

Jhāna can be thought of as the practice of brahmacariya on this level that is closest to the literal meaning of the word: the elevation of the mind entirely above the sensual domain, while still living with a human body

based in the sensory world. Celibacy, virtue and sense restraint all lead in the same direction and emulate the principle of non-sensuality. But it is only where there is complete separation from sense-dependent existence, with joy born of that separation, that one can be said to be seeing through non-sensual (super-human) eyes. Separation from sensuality is precisely what defines that type of "vision" and this is why it is the tool for overcoming animal eyes and sensual existence.

What kind of vision is this?

If one were to live entirely like an unrestrained animal, the mere arising of a fearful sight would immediately imply action to get away from it. The arising of a desired object would effectively equate to the pursuit of it. When there is no restraint, there is no space between an object and an action towards it. Or more precisely, the space that is there, or could be there, becomes completely invisible. It does not appear for you. All you see is the object that you want or the object that you hate; your own actions, aims, intentions, breadth of possibilities in regard to it are kept unseen. At the extreme end of this that emulates the animal realm, objects imply only reaction, and everything in between is passed over and obscured.

So, even to consider and be able to articulate different possibilities as opposed to merely giving in to a desire, already demonstrates a relative degree of vision in regard to those very possibilities and actions; in regard to the situation as a whole in which those possibilities exist. If one were not to see these things at all, one would not be able to think about them or consequently speak about them.

Yet this degree of vision is still almost blind by the standards of brahmacariya. And this can equally be known right here and now: you can know that there are things that could arise within the body, or through the senses, that would make you feel as though you cannot freely consider any range of possibilities in regard to them. You would just react, or feel constrained and pressured to act in one particular direction – or simply become stricken with confusion and doubt.

So when something that could arise through the senses implies, or pressures one toward, reaction by body, speech or mind; and when this implication is overlooked and taken for granted, the mind's eye is blind to the "image" of that arisen thing, and cannot understand it.

One remains then living *in* and *amidst* the world and the senses – by continually acting out of the pressures of the elements, and accepting the relationship between those pressures and the thoughts and actions for them. This is a state in which one lives perpetually, regardless of whether there is an immediate and acute pressure currently affecting one. The point is that at any given time, one is liable to be swayed, burdened and moved by things that one does not fully understand.

This ever-present liability is what it means to live under the weight of hindrances, which are obscurity in themselves. That is why the Buddha says in MN 128 that the mental movements of doubt, excitement, agitation, over-attention, and so on, are what bring darkness and shut down both light and vision. In the stock descriptions of jhāna in the suttas, what one is being separated from is the state of living and thinking that is under the influence of these same tendencies. It is this separation that gives rise to joy and happiness.

And, in DN 27, when the beings with light of their own and nourished by joy began to go after tastes, their own light disappeared. For as long as one is making oneself existentially and emotionally dependent on external things that require external, fleshy eyes and sunlight, there is no clarity of internal vision possible. The mind's eye remains darkened.

Imagine, then, if you were to train in the reverse direction, of brahmacariya, to the point that any such relationship with and constraint of the body would become entirely undone and powerless. Regardless of what might arise through any of the six senses, that could not imply or induce desire, or doubt, or panic, or movement. Any such arisen thing would be clearly seen in its entirety – not through any mystical revelation, but simply because there is nothing obstructing it. It would feel like relief from debt, or being released from a prison. This is what would, if sufficiently steadied and developed, become the unencumbered mind's eye that sees in all directions – the vision of the gods.

# Bhikkhu Anīgha

## SĪLA IS SAMĀDHI

*(by Bhikkhu Anīgha)*

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What exactly is the connection between *sīla* and *samādhi*? Is it that virtue *aids* or *facilitates* the development of mental composure[158], in the way that a suitable diet *contributes* to an athlete's top physical performance—a secondary factor that allows for better results with greater ease, or that prevents setbacks down the line? This is what the relationship is often imagined to be, especially given how modern notions of *samādhi* go together with arbitrary practices that have no direct connection to the abstinence from unwholesome acts, except perhaps in that one cannot move, speak, or (supposedly) think *at all* while one is engaging in them. Because of this, the link between *sīla* and *samādhi* is often rather contrived and tenuous, and is not a central theme within the overall picture.

> *"A renunciant thus accomplished in virtue sees no danger in any direction with regard to their virtuous restraint. In the same way as a king who has defeated his enemies sees no danger from his foes in any direction, a renunciant thus accomplished in virtue sees no danger in any direction regarding their virtuous restraint. When they are endowed with this* ***noble aggregate of virtue*** *(****ariya-sīla-khandha****), they experience a blameless happiness internally. That's how a renunciant is accomplished in virtue."*
>
> *-DN 2*

Being *accomplished* in virtue provides one with a form of composure that one can easily fail to recognize due to one's expectations of what *samādhi* is about, and thus even a person who has put in the work into their virtue correctly can end up misapplying their efforts in various directions that do not take that same virtue as foundation, which is what would have not only resulted in greater composure, but also in a comparatively straightforward and seamless manner.[159] Conversely, one not yet sufficiently accomplished in virtue can be tempted to put the cart before the horse, and thereby end up reaping either frustration, or a sort of *samādhi* that somehow does not seem to be contributing to true knowledge-&-vision, thereby destroying the first five fetters and making them *incapable* of experiencing lust for sensual pleasures and ill-will. Because that is what *sammāsamādhi* would *have to* result in, especially if the person already has plenty of familiarity with the Dhamma and the Four Noble Truths, *and* they've been practicing right composure for years.[160]

That other sort of *samādhi* would instead provide a person with ecstatic experiences that simply take them away from their problems for a while… until they come back, while also encouraging them to keep the virtue chiefly ***in order to*** once again experience the meditative ecstasy they can't have enough of, not because they are *truly* disenchanted with sensuality, which is actually a *prerequisite* for the first jhāna.[161]

> *"For one who is composed* ***no volition need be exerted****: 'Let me know and see things as they really are.' It is natural that one who is composed knows and sees things as they really are.*
>
> *"For one who knows and sees things as they really are no volition need be exerted: 'Let me be disenchanted and dispassionate.' It is natural that one who knows and sees things as they really are is disenchanted and dispassionate.*

[158] Translating "*samādhi*" as "composure" throughout. It will become apparent how and why "concentration" or "absorption" are highly inaccurate.

[159] Of course, this is not to say "easy" or "quick", let alone formulaic, methodical, and comprehensible to the masses, but rather that it will be plainly obvious how, to use an analogy, it's all been the growth and development of one and the same plant, without an introduction of alien factors. That growth and development is what is called the "Gradual Training" in the Suttas.

[160] And even before reaching freedom from sensuality, it would be clear that that's where one is heading.

[161] cf. AN 6.73. Notice the emphatic expression "seen correctly as it truly is with proper wisdom" (*yathābhūtaṁ sammappaññāya sudiṭṭhaṁ*). This Sutta alone should serve to disprove the idea of "pure *samādhi* without discernment"—a viable notion only when *samādhi* is taken to be the result of a repetitive exercise of attention and "no thinking", something which is notably absent from the Suttas unless it's being read into them. The standard instruction for abandoning the five hindrances in the Suttas (e.g. DN 2, MN 39, MN 107…) is nothing other than *contemplating* the drawbacks of those very five hindrances, regarding them as debt, illness, imprisonment, slavery and an uncrossed desert. An example of this practice will be given here.

*"For one who is disenchanted and dispassionate no volition need be exerted: 'Let me realize the knowledge and vision of liberation.' It is natural that one who is disenchanted and dispassionate realizes the knowledge and vision of liberation."*

-AN 10.2

Now, I should clarify what the expression "aggregate of/accomplishment in virtue" means[162], since it is obviously not being claimed that mere adherence to a set of rules, be it 5, 10, or 500, is enough to give rise to *samādhi*. *Sīla* or virtue should not be taken—at least by one who aspires to mental purification—as the undertaking of the precepts alone, but rather, using the common phrase of the Suttas, as the avoidance of the *slightest fault*[163], i.e., any action by body and speech that is motivated by lust, aversion, or distraction. This means that one must start recognizing these unwholesome things *in one's own mind*, rather than determining what is suitable and unsuitable through the details of *what* one did, where, how, at what time, to whom, or for what external reason[164], or because it simply "feels" nice, wholesome or kind on the surface[165]. This proper virtue also involves not being content with simply adhering to the external form and standards set by a specific tradition or group.

By gradually learning, first and foremost, to *recognize* one's state of mind[166] as it is, and then taking *that* as the criterion for the character of all of one's actions, big or small as they may be, one is already working towards the indispensable foundation of all proper *samādhi*—picking up the "hints" of the mind (*cittassa nimitta*)[167]. The discernment of those "hints" is what enables one to abandon defilements where they *actually are* starting with one's actions, as opposed to dealing with secondary factors or taking on practices and habits one *assumes* to be always wholesome in themselves:

*"Bhikkhus, suppose a foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook were to present a king or a royal minister with various kinds of curries: sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, sharp, mild, salty, bland. That foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not pick up the hint of his own master's preference:*

*'Today this curry pleased my master, or he reached for this one, or he took a lot of this one, or he spoke in praise of this one; or the sour curry pleased my master today, or he reached for the sour one, or he took a lot of the sour one, or he spoke in praise of the sour one; or the bitter curry … or the pungent curry … or the sweet curry … or the sharp curry … or the mild curry … or the salty curry … or the bland curry pleased my master … or he spoke in praise of the bland one.'*

*"That foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not gain [gifts of] clothing, wages, and bonuses. For what reason? Because that foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not pick up the hint of his own master's preference.*

*"So too, bhikkhus, here some foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, recollected, having curbed longing and aversion regarding the world. While he dwells contemplating the body in the body, his mind does not become composed, **the blemishes are not abandoned**, he does not pick up that hint.*

*He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings … mind in mind … phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, recollected, having curbed longing and aversion regarding the world. While he dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, his mind does not become composed, the blemishes are not abandoned, he does not pick up that hint.*

*"That foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu does not gain pleasant dwellings in this very life, **nor does he gain recollectedness and clear comprehension (sati-sampajaññā)**. For what reason? Because,*

[162] *Accomplished in Virtue*

[163] Definition of a Fault

[164] Hence, falling into excessive clarification of the details of the rules to find out what is a fault is a mistake. The fault is in one's own mind, and no amount of scholarly hair splitting of the texts can reveal that, but only self-honesty.

[165] Not that kindness is bad, but merely "feeling good" is an insufficient criterion.

[166] This alone takes a great deal of work and abandoning of ingrained views.

[167] I've chosen to render *cittassa nimitta* as "hint of the mind" to avoid the connotation of a mystical "sign" or "image" that would appear to one in the way a sight would. This is impossible if that *nimitta* is to be anything central to freedom from suffering, which it absolutely is.

*bhikkhus, that foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu does not pick up the hint of his own mind.*

-SN 47.8[168]

This Sutta points out how a person would not realize that using the four *satipaṭṭhānas* is not automatically skilful in and of itself, just like any given dish is not guaranteed to please the king, no matter how good the cook or other people think it is, or even how much the king took from it yesterday. The four *satipaṭṭhānas* are skilful **only** if they are being used *for the sake of abandoning the blemishes*. And for that, one needs to ***see*** "blemish as blemish" clearly *first*, i.e. see the hints of the defilements in one's mind, which practically goes hand-in-hand with stream-entry. [169]

And this ability to "aim" the four *satipaṭṭhānas* at the right place and thereby achieve all these beneficial results, including *samādhi*, is nothing other than a more refined instance of the same discernment that needs to accompany one's virtue: one needs stop judging good and bad behavior by the external properties of an action, e.g. by the tone of one's speech and the choice of words, or the fact that all Buddhists or those in one's tradition agree that doing or saying this or that is good, and instead *see* whether there is *internal* greed, aversion, or delusion *behind* those superficially "good" actions in one's mind here-&-now. In this way, it becomes obvious how *samādhi* is the *same skill*, just practiced on a much subtler level.

So, if a person fails to grasp the hints of their mind in the coarse context of bodily and verbal actions to the point where the *slightest fault* in any environment circumstance, anywhere in the world can be avoided with certainty, independent of what others or a spiritual tradition may regard as a fault, how will they possibly grasp those hints when it comes to the more refined level of thoughts, in order to *know* the mental blemishes properly and tackle them where they are to be found, instead of misusing the four *satipaṭṭhānas* to address secondary mental phenomena that they *take to be* blemishes?[170]

It's like saying "I can't reliably land an arrow on the *tree trunk*, but I can definitely shoot down the mangoes."

Not even seeing the value of this higher virtue, it is easy to end up believing that stopping one's thinking is what the first *jhāna* is about. It is the same as believing that it's necessary to lock oneself up in a cell for the rest of one's life and never see another human to never commit unsuitable acts by body and speech again. Failing to see what the root of the problem is, one takes the easy route, trying to throw *everything* away, instead of going through the hard work of refining one's criteria of what really needs to be discarded. This is a task which will initially seem much less "palpable", and instead feel vague, uncertain, and comparatively unsatisfying, especially because there is no obvious "prize" waiting anywhere in the vicinity, unlike with a meditation technique, which may promise one such things within days.

Having established these points, what the "aggregate of virtue" mentioned above is should be much clearer, as well as how it would seamlessly *become* mental composure when further refined and fortified. The meaning of the simile of the king defeating his enemies in the first Sutta quoted, DN 2, can be seen in light of this. By seeing the hints of your own mind, recognizing those "enemies" *internally* where they truly are, you gain complete certainty that nothing that comes from any direction whatsoever (circumstances, people, accidents, mistakes) can *force you* to commit a fault, a blemish to your virtue. Having defiled motivations in

[168] This does not mean, as it's sometimes interpreted, that different "skilful means" are necessary at different times or for different people. It rather means that, if *any* approach to the practice from the Suttas is not freeing a person from the defilements, it's because they still haven't learned how to recognize those very defilements, not because "it's not the right approach for them or at this time".

[169] MN 9: *"When, friends, a noble disciple* ***understands*** *the unwholesome and the root of the unwholesome, the wholesome and the root of the wholesome, in that way he is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has unwavering confidence in the Dhamma and has arrived at this true Dhamma."* This is why Right View is necessary for Right Recollectedness, let alone Right Composure.

[170] This is an instance where the famous passage from the Kālāmasutta is acutely relevant: *"Come, Kālāmas, do not go by (1) oral tradition, by (2) lineage of teaching, by (3) hearsay, by (4) a collection of scriptures, by (5) logical reasoning, by (6) inferential reasoning, by (7) reasoned cogitation, by (8) the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by (9) the seeming competence [of a speaker], or (10) because you think: 'The ascetic is our guru.' But when, Kālāmas, you** **know** for yourselves: 'These things are unwholesome; these things are blameworthy; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to harm and suffering,' then you should abandon them." —AN 3.66 *If one does not see the hints of the mind, it is* impossible *that one's virtue or meditation practice is based on anything apart from these 10 things. Hence the emphasis above on"take to be blemishes." The actual blemishes of both virtue and mind will not be abandoned* simply because *what is a blemish is being believed, guessed, felt, surmised, reasoned, inferred… instead of* discerned*. Faith, learning and reasoning are indispensable, but success takes more than that.

your mind, overlooking them, and acting out of them is what constitutes a fault.[171] This is how you become your own "enemy".

The word "aggregate" *(khandha)* also adds an important nuance. When the Suttas talk about "aggregate of *sīla/samādhi/paññā*" this denotes a level of acquisition of that quality which no longer requires *active effort* or additions to it, but is now just "sitting there" like a heap or pile, the literal meaning of *khandha*. In the context of virtue, it means that one no longer needs to stop and interrogate oneself before every action for 10 minutes like in the beginning,[172] but rather every suitable and unsuitable intention within one's mind is clear beyond doubt just by "looking" at it. One has sufficiently learned how to *pick up the hints* of the mind's previously unnoticed motivations. Consequently, rather than needing effort to *keep* one's virtue, effort is now required to *break it*. Using the previous simile, the king would now have to *intentionally* be careless and allow his enemies an opening to strike back and successfully defeat him. It's just too obvious when they're planning to strike back.

And this recognition, as the Sutta goes on to say, is what gives rise to a blameless joy. It's "blameless" because it's not based on something that you *acquired* and will sooner or later be ripped away from you,[173] but on something you would have to, *with full deliberation, choose* to cast aside. Literally, not even death itself can take that aggregate of virtue away, and much less can the lack of an ideal retreat environment do so.

At this point it should be noted that this *aggregate* of higher virtue (not just a *pile* of mere precepts and observances), paired with the instructions of one who sees the Dhamma (*parato ghosa*), should already be enough of a basis for a person to develop the Right View. In fact, in the Suttas, the phrase "one who has fulfilled virtue" is often one of the epithets of a *sotāpanna*.

> *Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu **fulfils virtue**, but cultivates composure and wisdom only to a **moderate extent.** He falls into offenses in regard to the lesser and minor training rules and rehabilitates himself. For what reason? **Because I have not said that he is incapable of this.** But in regard to those training rules that are fundamental to the spiritual life, in conformity with the spiritual life, his behavior is constant and steadfast. Having undertaken the training rules, he trains in them. With the utter destruction of three fetters, he is a seven-times-at-most attainer who, after roaming and wandering on among devas and humans seven times at most, makes an end of suffering.*
>
> -AN 3.86[174]

Notice that it is said that such a person might still break minor rules at times (even the Arahant mentioned later in the Sutta could), but that is not what the *fulfilment* of virtue is. It's the fact that they cannot overlook the hints of the unwholesome motivations in their own mind[175], and *because of that*, they do not transgress by acting out of *those* motivations, which is what would compromise the essential training.[176]

Therefore, given that composure is a refinement of the same principle as virtue, it is unlikely (but not impossible) that a person would be able to see their own mind to the point necessary to attain the *jhānas* taught by

[171] And in the case of breaking the five precepts (with complete celibacy as the fifth), the motivation cannot *not* be defiled. Pretty much everything else requires discernment of one's underlying motivation to be categorized.

[172] And yes, it may be like this initially, but that's only because one is still not sufficiently practiced in picking up the hints of where the faults lie internally.

[173] This includes a "meditation experience" in the contemporary sense. Anyone who has gotten one of those can ask themselves if it didn't feel like an *acquisition* that they needed to *protect* and were afraid of losing. And yet the first *jhāna* is the *result* of detachment from all acquisitions. *"Here, **owing to withdrawal from acquisitions**… a bhikkhu dwells having entered the first jhāna." —MN 64*

[174] Note how this is the *lowest possible stage* for a noble disciple. A case of "fulfils virtue but has no composure" is not mentioned, proving the intimate relationship between the two, also considering that such a disciple with up to 7 lives left would likely not be abiding in *jhānas* yet (cf. MN 13 and AN 3.95). And it will be clear how the virtue described here would eventually take one's composure and discernment to this "moderate extent", even when not dedicating a separate effort to them.

[175] *(1) it is impossible that a bhikkhu who delights in company, who is delighted with company, who is devoted to delight in company; who delights in a group, who is delighted with a group, who is devoted to delight in a group, will find delight in solitude when he is alone. (2) It is impossible that one who does not find delight in solitude when he is alone will grasp the hint of the mind. (3) **It is impossible that one who does not grasp the hint of the mind will fulfil right view**. (4) It is impossible that one who does not fulfil right view will fulfil right composure. (5) It is impossible that one who does not fulfil right composure will abandon the fetters. (6) Without having abandoned the fetters, it is impossible that one will realize nibbāna.*—AN 6.68

[176] See SN 8.1 on the utter confidence in their virtue such a person would have, despite still not *fully* seeing the escape from the mental aspect of the unwholesome. That confidence reflects what *sammāsamādhi* is—immovability amidst things that try to move you.

the Buddha and not become a *sotāpanna* first, because they would've already reached the necessary development long before that. The most likely cause of not becoming one is that they haven't heard the Dhamma sufficiently, or at all, but this is hardly possible today if they put in that much work into purifying their mind correctly, given that other spiritual traditions tend not to stress the abandonment of sensuality to the necessary degree.

In light of this—while an unenlightened person should be encouraged to put in the work towards *understanding* the practice of composure, since understanding it correctly to the necessary degree would already constitute seeing the Fourth Noble Truth and thus stream-entry[177]—they'd be better off not expecting it to culminate in an actual *jhāna* anytime soon, but rather regarding those efforts as one possible avenue to approach the Dhamma, and as a good way to learn how to grasp the hints of the mind and thus of wholesome and unwholesome, which is the condition for stream-entry.

Thus, again, the work would then be in attempting to *understand* what Right Composure is, being careful not to assume they already know what it is, that they understand the *Noble* Eightfold Path. And certainly, taking any "special meditation experiences" they may've had in the past, which somehow don't seem to have contributed to abandonment of sensuality and ill-will, with a pinch of salt.

If this is kept in mind, it is possible for a person still without the Right View, but who has developed their virtue to as high of a degree as possible, to derive some benefit from often pursuing the following type of reflections as a "meditation" practice in the proper sense.[178]

Virtue (which includes sense restraint, moderation in eating, and general not acting out of unwholesome states[179]) needs to have been developed and understood to a point where you can at least notice some degree of that "blameless joy", which comes from discerning and correctly restraining the degree of unwholesome intentions that you've learned to pick up on so far, without intentionally *trying* to give rise to that joy with the help of secondary mental drills, because that would be done *at the expense* of the abandoning of craving.

Having gone to a solitary place, free from the presence of others and from distractions, thoughts in the form of desires, annoyances, boredom/laziness, anxieties and doubts about various issues will inevitably come to the foreground of attention, and here you can—with the *memory* of your virtue[180] as the central foundation—start discerning how a different route than the usual two extremes of indulgence and denial can be taken towards those mental states.[181]

So, *recalling* (sati) the past efforts to develop virtue, are there some valuable insights that could be carried over and used to not let the mind get blemished on account of these assailing thoughts which clearly came on their own, *without* wanting to put your hand into what is not yours by trying to get rid of them?

Remember some occasion in the recent past where you were faced with a prospect to break your virtue. What did you do? Did you find a way to stop that annoying fly from doing what it does, or did you simply resolve that you *would not kill it?* Do you smash every bottle of alcohol you come across, or do you simply *not drink* even if you're asked to? Did you prevent all sexually appealing people from existing, or did you simply *restrain* the urge to pursue them? And, most importantly, why is it that you now don't feel a threat to your virtue whenever these temptations and annoyances inevitably knock at your door, much unlike when your virtue was still weak?[182]

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[177] The understanding of one truth cannot but bring with it all the others. SN 56.30.

[178] Abandoning of Sensuality is What Meditation Is

[179] See what ***precedes***, not ***results from***, practicing *sati* and *samādhi* in AN 8.63. Same in every Gradual Training sequence.

[180] *Sīlanussati:* One of the 4 recollections that recur throughout the Suttas, aimed at the abandonment of unwholesome states (cf. SN 9.11). The first of these, recollection of the Buddha, is often taken to be the repetition of the mantra "buddho". Does this mean the 4th, the recollection of virtue, simply entails using the word "sīlaṁ" as mantra instead? I think anyone familiar with the Suttas would agree that what follows below is more likely to be what the Buddha intended with those practices. If it were not, he could have saved a lot of time and simply focused on teaching how to use mantras or similar techniques properly, instead of leaving us with all these thousands of *contemplations*. Also, how exactly a mantra would lead to permanent freedom from *dukkha* is not evident here-&-now, as the Dhamma would always be.

[181] *Becoming Imperturbable*

[182] Note well: This does not mean one should *seek* to have more temptations to break precepts in one's environment—on the contrary. It just means that even after withdrawing as much as possible, temptations are bound to arise.

It will be evident that it's because now you're *confident* that you will ***not*** open that door, no matter how hard or how long it gets knocked on. And *that alone* is what gives rise to the *factual* safety you would be able to recognize, and precisely because it doesn't depend on circumstances anymore does it feel like safety—it cannot be compromised by anyone but yourself.

So, it is more than reasonable to conclude that an even deeper sense of safety could be achieved *while* these thoughts are now knocking at the *mental* door[183] when you're in seclusion, if you found a way to be confident that you will *not* open it no matter how much of a racket those thoughts make "outside" of it.

To accomplish this, it will be necessary to be clear on what exactly constitutes "opening the door", and what constitutes "noise outside" because given the subtlety of the distinction, one is guaranteed to confuse the former with the latter and vice versa in the beginning. *The "hints" won't be obvious.*

Let's take arguably the most relevant instance of a "door knocker", which is a thought of a beautiful object:

> *"They are not sensuality, the pretty things **in the world**:*
> *a person's sensuality is **volitional lust (saṅkapparāga)**;*
> *the pretty things remain just as they are in the world,*
> *but the wise remove the desire for them."*
>
> -AN 6.63

But what does the Buddha mean by "the world"? Does he mean "out there in the city"?

> *Venerable sir, it is said, 'the world, the world.' In what way, venerable sir, might there be the world or the description of the world?"*
>
> *"Where there is the eye, Samiddhi, where there are forms, eye-consciousness, things to be cognized by eye-consciousness, there the world exists or the description of the world.*
>
> *"Where there is the ear … the mind, where there are mental phenomena, mind-consciousness, things to be cognized by mind-consciousness, there the world exists or the description of the world.*
>
> -SN 35.68

So then, it is *volitional lust* **towards** that which manifests within the world (the 6 sense bases) that constitutes sensuality. Anything less than this is just a "pretty thing in the world". But how would one pick up the "hint" of that *volitional lust?* Is it by whether the perception of the object is present *at all*? Would it be instead by the intensity of emotional pressure, the feeling that accompanies the thought? Would it be by the *possibilities* / intentions *(cetanā)* implied in it?[184]

Luckily, several Suttas give us the answer in different formulations but with the same meaning. Two examples should suffice:

> *At Sāvatthī. Sitting to one side, the Venerable Rādha said to the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, it said, 'Māra, Māra'. What now, venerable sir, is Māra?"*
>
> *"Form, Rādha, is Māra.* ***Feeling*** *…* ***Perception*** *…* ***Intentions*** *… Consciousness is Māra…*
>
> -SN 23.12

[183] This is really not optional in the way commonly assumed. The intention to stop one's thoughts *before* fully developing the the actual first *jhāna*, let alone before even *having* it, is always underlied by a subtler, peripheral, not *directly* noticeable intention of desire / aversion, which people generally would not see because they can't grasp the hints of such intentions and often aren't trying to. Even if one succeeds in supposedly "not thinking", that "little-yet-large" craving is lurking there and being blissfully ignored the whole time, no matter how much ecstatic pleasure is being felt. The proof is in how one would get even a tiny bit annoyed if the pleasure suddenly ceased, which wouldn't be the case with the pleasure of *utter indifference to all gain and loss* that comes with wholesome *samādhi*.

[184] The term "intention" *(cetanā* or *saṅkhāra)* denotes a *possibility* that a sense experience presents to act in some way. "Volition" is the choice to act upon those possibilities, similar in practice to *kamma*, except in the case of the Arahant. See further explanation on "mental action" below.

*"The eye is mine, ascetic, forms are mine,* ***the base where eye-pressure is cognized***[185] ***is mine. Where can you go, ascetic, to escape from me?***

*The ear is mine, ascetic, sounds are mine … The nose is mine, ascetic, odours are mine … The tongue is mine, ascetic, tastes are mine … The body is mine, ascetic, tactile objects are mine … The mind is mine, ascetic, mental phenomena are mine,* ***the base where mind-pressure is cognized is mine. Where can you go, ascetic, to escape from me?"***

-SN 4.19

What these passages imply is that no amount of pressure, feeling or *suggested* actions that a sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or thought brings with it can possibly be what lust is *in and of itself*, because if that were the case, there would be no escape from lust, no escape from Māra. Lust would *have to* arise without fail if certain feelings were to arise.[186] But luckily, this is not the case, and thus liberation is possible to begin with.

Rather, as the verse from AN 6.63 says, it is one's ***volitional lust***, one's *deliberate choice to accept* the presented possibilities to try to "release" the mental pressure that is the problem. Not the pressure, perceptions, feeling or the *suggestions* to act in and of themselves, no matter how they arise—these are just the "racket outside the door", the door that one can learn how to keep closed and remain safely behind, at ease. Besides:

*"Then, engaging further in inward exploration, he explores thus: 'When this craving arises, where does it arise? When it settles down, upon what does it settle?'*

*"As he explores, he understands thus: 'Whatever in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down. 'And what in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature?* ***The eye*** *has a pleasant and agreeable nature in the world:* ***it is here*** *that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down. So too* ***the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind*** *have a pleasant and agreeable nature:* ***it is here*** *that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down.*

-SN 12.66

Thus, it'd be wrong to think that abandonment and replacement of *sense objects*, including thoughts that arose on their own, is abandonment of craving.[187]

Now, continuing from where we left off, you are in seclusion now, away from people and distractions, plus you keep your virtue and sense restraint well and see the danger in the slightest fault, so you don't *do* anything lustful with your body and speech, and yet evidently the mind is still not free from lust. This is where "mental action" is taking place, the choice to "open the door" for the bandits waiting outside, which is still being overlooked.

The reason why the door is still "open" is because the mind *(citta)* still *values* the possibility of experiencing the pleasure that is being offered by the mind *(mano)*[188]. Thus, you are not *certain* in your internal renunciation of that *offered* pleasure, unlike in the domains of body and speech. This means that, even though you have developed restraint and are not specifically *planning* to pursue the pleasure through actions, the *citta* still holds, to some vague degree, that it would be "nice" to experience with the body this offer that

[185] Translating "*phassa*" as "pressure", a more practically useful rendering. Also note that feelings, perceptions, and intentions (*cetanā*) arise due to the base of *phassa*. Since *phassa* belongs to Māra, these 3 things must do so too

[186] It is not a coincidence that the tendency is to want to stop thinking, and in some cases shut down the 5 senses altogether (see AN 5.113). It is *because* one is too weak to endure the pressure that the objects exert that one wants to remove them, and a weak mind is a mind without *samādhi*. This, or one genuinely believes that the feeling accompanying the thought ***is*** the lust, which will make the cessation of lust impossible except by becoming a robot with "bare perceptions", a rather popular notion that is actually nonsensical. Note also that *vedanā* are not *sensations*, they are mental phenomena. *"Feeling, perception, and consciousness, friend—these phenomena are conjoined, not disjoined, and it is* ***impossible to separate each of these phenomena from the others*** *in order to describe the difference between them. For what one feels, that one perceives; and what one perceives, that one cognizes." —MN 43*

[187] This applies even if one is not fully trying to "stop thinking" or "concentrate", but still misusing Dhamma reflections to *prevent* thoughts arising on their own from exerting their respective pressure—still blaming the *hook* for the issue, not one's biting of it.

[188] In brief: *citta* (sometimes rendered "heart") is responsible for actions and all unwholesome states and is what needs to be purified, while *mano* (intellect), which is responsible for *dhammas* (thoughts/images), is Māra's property and is where he sets up his "bait". "Hint of the mind" refers to *citta*, not *mano*.

*mano* is presenting. And that value of "nice" is where the unwholesome is, *not* in what is being presented. This is what the Suttas mean by "welcoming, delighting in, entertaining agreeable objects". The only proper solution to this is to abandon that *value*, that notion of "nice to get this", right where it is, without trying to prevent the *offer* and its pressuring feeling from being there—that feeling is *utterly inseparable from that perception*, as said above. Both the feeling and perception clearly have come, and will likely come again in the future, as a "bait" placed by Māra, and their presence is thus not in your ultimate control.

That "value" can be abandoned not by *choosing* to stop valuing the pleasure directly, but by clarifying and reflecting on the drawbacks of *accepting* the bait that is being presented to you.[189]

One does not need supramundane discernment to realize that *stepping into a trap* is never in one's best interests, no matter how good the bait in it is. Even if once you're inside, the hunter is nice enough to give you a few more treats, the fact is that *now you're in his control*, so if he ever feels like doing something bad to you, you have no way to stop it. And deep down you know, he *will* do so ultimately, at the latest when your sense bases, which you have been doubling down in regarding as yours and as dear by valuing their pleasures, begin to break apart.[190]

> *"Bhikkhus, in the Himalayas, the king of mountains, there are rugged and uneven zones where neither monkeys nor human beings can go; there are rugged and uneven zones where monkeys can go but not human beings; there are even and delightful regions where both monkeys and human beings can go. There, along the monkey trails, hunters set out traps of pitch for catching monkeys.*
>
> *"Those monkeys who are not foolish and frivolous, when they see the pitch, avoid it from afar. But a monkey who is foolish and frivolous approaches the pitch and seizes it with his hand; he gets caught there. Thinking, 'I will free my hand,' he seizes it with his other hand; he gets caught there. Thinking, 'I will free both hands,' he seizes it with his foot; he gets caught there. Thinking, 'I will free both hands and my foot,' he seizes it with his other foot; he gets caught there.' Thinking, 'I will free both hands and feet,' he applies his muzzle to it; he gets caught there.*
>
> *"Thus, bhikkhus, that monkey, trapped at five points, lies there screeching. He has met with calamity and disaster and the hunter can do with him as he wishes. The hunter spears him, fastens him to that same block of wood, and goes off where he wants. So it is, bhikkhus, when one strays outside one's own resort into the domain of others.*
>
> *"Therefore, bhikkhus, do not stray outside your own resort into the domain of others. Māra will gain access to those who stray outside their own resort into the domain of others; Māra will get a hold on them.*
>
> *"And what is not a bhikkhu's own resort but* ***the domain of others?*** *It is the five cords of sensuality. This is what is not a bhikkhu's own resort but the domain of others."*
>
> -SN 47.7[191]
>
> *At Sāvatthī. "Bhikkhus, when one dwells contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, craving increases. With craving, assumption is; with assumption, being is; with being, birth is; with birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair exist. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.*
>
> *"Suppose, bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and a man would pour oil into it and adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, sustained by that oil, fuelled by it, that oil lamp would burn for a very long time. So too, when one lives contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, craving increases…. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.*
>
> *"Bhikkhus, when one dwells contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases. Without craving, there is no assumption; without assumption, there is no being… no birth … aging-and-death,*

[189] The Danger Contemplation

[190] Incidentally, people in the Suttas often became *sotāpannas* as a result of the Buddha expounding the danger of sensuality, with the sort of reflections exemplified here, which freed their mind from hindrances, and *then* the Noble Truths. It was not because they had been doing "concentration" practices before.

[191] The Monkey Trap Sutta

*sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair do not exist. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.*

*"Suppose, bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and the man would not pour oil into it or adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, when the former supply of fuel is exhausted, that oil lamp, not being fed with any more fuel, lacking sustenance, would be extinguished. So too, when one lives contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases…. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering."*

-SN 12.53

It must be emphasized that the purpose of this contemplation of danger is not to get rid of the arisen *thought*, but to address one's inability to remain *internally* unmoved by its alluring nature. It is because you are *emotionally bothered* by that "itch" that you relish the prospect of getting it "scratched'. But in and of itself, no amount of itch *requires* scratching. One's mind not being free from lust, infected with distorted notions, is what *assumes* that scratching is"necessary". Also, notice how in the above Sutta, the man simply *refrains* from doing what would cause the lamp to burn longer than it should on its own. He doesn't *manually* try to get the oil out or put out the fire. This is the only way to abandon an unwholesome state without generating another.

If you were to maintain this context of "danger" on the *right level* long enough, where that "scratch" is being *desired* instead of where the "itch" i[192]s, you would at some point realize that the *same itch* is no longer unpleasant[193] because you no longer *feel a need* to scratch it, not because you got rid of it by force. Rather than being a threat, the "itch", which is not bothering you at all anymore, will now serve to remind you of your state of safety from the *need* to scratch, as if you're now free from debt, illness, imprisonment, slavery or managed to cross a desert. That sense of safety is a wholesome joy (and notice that you haven't stopped thinking). Because, how can you say "I am safe" unless you're safe *from something?* What's more, how can that safety and the joy arising from it become the central theme of your experience, your *abiding* as said in the Suttas, unless that which was a threat before is still being equally *recognized?* Forgetting about the threat would mean forgetting about the safety, even in mundane terms. This is why one who succeeds in this practice fully and disengages from sensuality correctly has "blindfolded" Māra:

*"And where is it that Māra and his following cannot go? Here, having fully disengaged from sensuality, fully disengaged from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu dwells having entered the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, with joy and pleasure born of disengagement. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra[194], to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Māra's eye of its opportunity."*

-MN 25

It is precisely because you **don't** prevent Māra from setting up his bait (which is none other than the pressure of the six sense bases) that he is confused and at a loss. Before this point, it had always been a *guaranteed* catch every time he set up the trap, given that even when you tried to avoid it before, you went overboard and attempted to *get rid* of the trap, by trying to get rid of the mental pressure—stop thinking, concentrate twice as hard hard on your abdomen or tip of your nose, etc.[195] Therefore, you always *touched* the trap either to eat the bait or to throw it away, and that's all the hunter needed to get you. But now, you are learning to

[192]Compare with the simile given in SN 12.66: The problem is *never* that the poisonous drink is tasty and agreeable, nor that it's being offered— the problem is when *you* lose perspective and want to drink it.

[193]But you must also not be *anticipating* that result and getting anxious to get it, because this would be a subtler form of still craving for pleasure and against pain. Wanting is to be completely abandoned *beforehand,* and the "itch" must be endured without expecting a reward at the end. *Samādhi* will not take care of your own craving for you, as is often hoped. *Samādhi* is the *result* of not acting out of craving, expectations and worries on any level.

[194]Isn't it strange that "meditation" tends to involve "blindfolding" *oneself* by going into a trance, rather than blindfolding Māra? Note that indeed, the second jhāna *is* the cessation of thinking and pondering, but that is something that is *built upon the basis* of the pristine clarity of thinking of the first *jhāna*. So it's not "blindfolding" oneself at all, but developing *even more* clarity of the nature of Māra's traps. It's then even harder to foolishly overlook and fall for them in the future.

[195]*Asubha* contemplation also tends to be misused to *get rid of the bait,* not to simply make sure to not eat it. Another way of grabbing it and being caught. On Asubha

not *take* the bait, nor try to *remove* it either. This is, contrary to one's distorted gut-feeling, is the only way to stay safe:

> *"How, dear sir, did you cross the flood?"*
> *"By not halting, friend, and by not struggling I crossed the flood."*
> *"But how is it, dear sir, that by not halting and by not straining you crossed the flood?"*
> *"When I halted, friend, then I sank; but when I struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not halting and by not struggling I crossed the flood."*
>
> -SN 1.1

That same reflection and attitude is to be applied to any other hindrance, irrespective of its peculiarities. This is because they all share the same nature of that "itch" or pressure, that "trap" which one will *automatically* fall for if unclear about where the line is and how to not cross it. Lack of clarity and perspective means *already* being trapped within a hindrance. Displeasure and annoyance are the second kind of "trap", which one must learn to "see through" and contemplate so as to see that the problem is one's subtle need to *act out of it*, which is what ill-will is. Same for the other 3 hindrances. All of them are actually different symptoms of the *same thing*.[196]

For this reason, if one simply learns to see "mental pressure" or "impulses" in the most general sense, even without classifying it into a particular hindrance, and learns to *neither act* out of that impulse *nor* prevent it from being where it is (a subtler way of acting out of it), then the entire *domain* of unwholesome, the domain of *kamma* and thus all suffering and adversity, can be surmounted one day. And this is the same principle that virtue is based upon—one does not accept the impulse to act out, nor does one prevent it from arising.

This "enduring" of mental pressure (*with the right perspective*, not just "mindless bearing") that is required to abandon the five hindrances is the common thread to *jhāna* and Nibbāna, which would have to culminate in the latter eventually when paired with correct views and instructions. This is how Right Composure *factually* inclines the mind towards Nibbāna.[197] Nibbāna is not about discovering a hidden experiential truth through an esoteric revelation or experience, but about perfect immovability, and thus *peace,* in the face of anything that can arise in one's experience. And with this, lust, aversion and delusion, and the fetters of self-view, conceit and ignorance are destroyed, because their *raison d'être* is gone—the constant, futile attempt to outrrun the pressure of the senses.

> *"The eye, bhikkhus, is the ocean for a person; its current consists of forms.*
>
> *One who **endures (sahati)** that impulse (vega) consisting of forms is said to have crossed the ocean of the eye with its waves, whirlpools, sharks, and demons. Crossed over, gone beyond, **the brahmin stands on high ground.***
>
> *"The ear, bhikkhus, is the ocean for a person…. The mind is the ocean for a person; its current consists of mental phenomena. One who **endures** that impulse of mental phenomena is said to have crossed the ocean of the mind with its waves, whirlpools, sharks and demons. Crossed over, gone beyond, the brahmin stands on high ground."*
>
> -SN 35.228 (*cf* AN 6.55)
>
> *Patient **endurance (khanti)** is the highest austerity*
> *Nibbāna is the highest, say the Buddhas*
> *For one gone forth does not hurt another;*
> *Disturbing another, one is not a samaṇa.*[198]

[196] *The Truth About the Five Hindrances*

[197] SN 53.1

[198] It's not a coincidence that "patient endurance" appears in the first line and Nibbāna in the second. It's not *just* talking about everyday "patience" and resilience. Also, one "does not disturb", or argue even with Māra, trying to get him to stop putting up his traps in the six sense base that is rightly his. In this way, one can truly abandon all craving: *"Friend, I assert and proclaim [my teaching] in such a way that one does not quarrel with **anyone** in the world with its gods, its **Māras**, and its Brahmās, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and its people; in such a way that perceptions no more underlie that brahmin who abides **detached from sensual pleasures**, without perplexity, devoid of worry, free from craving for any kind of being."— MN 18*

-Dhammapada 184

*"It is said, friend, 'nibbāna, nibbāna' In what way has the Blessed One spoken of nibbāna?"*

*"Here, friend, having fully disengaged from sensuality… a bhikkhu dwells having entered the first jhāna …. To this extent, too, the Blessed One has spoken of nibbāna* ***in a certain*** *sense** …*

*–AN 9.48 (see the other Suttas in this chapter)*[199]

*"I'm* ***not afraid of fear****.*
*Our teacher is skilled in* ***the deathless****;*
*Monks proceed by the path*
*Where fear cannot land on."*

*–Theragātha* 21

It should now be evident that abandoning these subtle mental attitudes and escaping Māra's traps in the right way would never be possible if a person is still falling for the obvious traps with their body and speech. No amount of effort in meditation would be able to make up for the fact that their *actions* are still infected with lust, aversion, and distraction.

Māra doesn't care how well you can perform a mechanical mental exercise and how much pleasure it provides you with. All that matters to him is, you still *could* bite the hook. For as long as that's the case, he's got you already. This is why *actions* by body, speech and mind are what enables the five hindrances, and thus ignorance, to thrive, and not one's lack of skill in repetitive techniques, "energy blockages" in one's body or mind, lack of merit from past lives, or anything else that distracts one away from starting to restrain those actions.

*Just as, when it is raining and the rain pours down in thick droplets on a mountaintop, the water flows down along the slope and fills the clefts, gullies, and creeks; and these then fill up the pools; these fill up the lakes … streams … rivers; and these then fill up the great ocean; thus there is nutriment for the great ocean, and in this way it becomes full. So too, not associating with superior persons fills up not hearing the true Dhamma; not hearing the true Dhamma fills up lack of faith… lack of ayoniso manasikāra … lack of recollectedness and clear comprehension… non-restraint of the senses… the three kinds of misconduct…* ***the three kinds of misconduct fill up the five hindrances****; the five hindrances fill up ignorance. Thus there is nutriment for ignorance, and in this way it becomes full.*

-AN 10.61

To sum up, the right kind of composure is in having the mental strength to not take Māra's bait without needing to shun it either, and developing the right kind of unwavering virtue is the first, indispensable step in that same direction.

Some more teachings on this proper practice of virtue and how it develops the mind:

- Essay: Intentions Behind One's
- Essay: The Necessity of Celibacy
- Purpose of the Precepts
- Importance of the Precepts — Looking for a Bigger Picture
- How Virtue Leads to Effortless Samādhi
- Relieving the Pressure of Restraint
- Jhāna is Virtue
- Forsaking the pleasure of "meditation"
- Making the World a Better Place

[199] This goes to show how even the first *jhāna* is something ***way*** more profound than it is usually given credit for contemporarily, often by putting too much weight on how *jhāna* is *technically* still not completely outside the realm of being (bhava). This is true from an *Arahant's* point of view, but for the ordinary person who is not even accomplished in virtue and still relishes sensual pleasures, the first *jhāna* taught by the Buddha is, for all intents and purposes, close to Nibbāna—an *extinguishment* of their deeply rooted *sensual being (kāmabhava)*. To illustrate, a 60 year old has all the right to call a 30 year old a "kid", but for a 6 year old child, both of the adults deserve almost the same respect. And indeed, there are cases in the Suttas such as that of Devadatta who had *jhānas*, but such people make history for a reason.

- Right Speech, Right Samādhi
- Sense Restraint is not Just for Monks
- Nibbāna, Right Speech, Virtuous Behavior
- Sense Restraint
- Responsibility can free you from suffering
- Q&A on Jhāna, Anxiety, Precepts
- Gateway to Nibbāna
- BOOK: The Only Way to Jhāna

## Seeing A Body Within The Body

******By Bhikkhu Anīgha******

> *"Bhikkhus, this is the one-way path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realisation of Nibbāna—namely, the Four Foundations of Recollection.*
>
> *"What are the four? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating* ******a body within the body (kāye kāyānupassī)*******, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having curbed longing and aversion for the world. He abides contemplating* ******a feeling within feelings******** (vedanāsu vedanānupassī)*******, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having curbed longing and aversion for the world. He abides contemplating* ******a mind within the mind******** (citte cittānupassī)*******, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having curbed longing and aversion for the world. He abides contemplating* ******a phenomenon within phenomena******** (dhammesu dhammānupassī)*******, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having curbed longing and aversion for the world*.
>
> —MN 10, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

In every conceivable experience, there are phenomena that are "farther" and phenomena that are "closer". For an undeveloped mind, what is "closer", more subtle, less defined and *less changeable* tends to be regarded as "me" and "mine", given that it's not even seen and is taken for granted, and attention rests on what is "over there" in the form of sense objects and the world. The usual way of practicing *satipaṭṭhāna* which involves keeping one's attention on bodily sensations and *objects* of various kinds, only serves to maintain this lack of development of the mind, and all the *seemingly* beneficial results it may provide will still be obtained within the framework that puts "me" at the center of experience, and thus are not truly beneficial in the quest for the freedom from suffering.[200]

Instead, the goal of right recollection (*sati*) is to establish and sustain the memory of a more accurate picture, that does not *overlook* that which is "closer", and takes into account its true nature of being liable to change and deterioration, just like everything that is "further away" from the point of view.

Seeing a "a body[1] within the body[2]", as the *satipaṭṭhāna* refrain goes, and which has been translated in a myriad ways that *miss the* ******central******* point,* means that you see your experience as a whole at any time, the entire six-sense field, as a body[2] that is less fundamental, secondary to body[1]. "Within" means just that: body[1] is at the "center" of body[2], because it's more primordial.

Body[1] can be anything that is a simultaneous foundation or necessary basis for body[2], which is whatever aspect of the body you see, use, and are attached to, as well as anything in the world you perceive. Most importantly, this body[2] is what your sense of self can call "me" and "mine". Body[1] is the material things that determine your body[2], such as your organs, the Four Great Elements, your breathing, or material "stuff" that is no more special than that which makes up a corpse (the practices mentioned under Body Contemplation in MN 10).

An analogy to illustrate the relationship between these "two bodies" can be made by borrowing from science for a moment. At the center of each galaxy, there is a black hole which the other celestial bodies

[200] Contrary to popular belief, *anattā* is not about there being no center to the experience and no individuality, in which case stark differences in character between two *Arahants* would be inexplicable. It's about the fact that the "center" is *not yours, not in your control.*

orbit around, owing to the black hole's immense gravitational pull. But this black hole cannot be *seen* or measured directly. Rather, the presence of the black hole is *implied* in the movement of the surrounding stars and planets. But, if unaware of the existence of black holes or how they work, one will have to *assume* that there is some mysterious force orchestrating all that movement. Similarly, whenever you don't indirectly *know* the presence of the true "center" of experience—of body[1], which equally cannot be perceived directly because that would put it within body[2]—then you are *already assuming* your sense of self to be that center, or the orchestrator of the movements, and this is the perpetual state of whoever lacks the Right View. For as long as you don't discern body[1] *within* body[2], which is what makes you a *sotāpanna*, your contemplation that "this is impermanent" or "this is not mine" is, to extend the analogy, just another star that you regard as orbiting around ******you******.

In the case of feeling, there's always a feeling in your experience that's more "central" than all the others, which are comparatively fleeting. An example of this is when you've having a good day, and all the particular things you encounter, some of which may be quite unpleasant, don't disturb you as much. Conversely, when that general feeling is unpleasant, even the things that would usually give you joy fail to do so.

If you see that at the core of all those other more particular feelings, determining them, lies that more primary feeling, you don't then need to go and "manually" remove the sense of ownership and tell yourself that this or that feeling is not yours. None of it will be yours because you're no longer the "center" whether you like it or not, but rather that "core" feeling is (and always was), since it is because of it that all the other particular feelings either pleased you or bothered you, regardless of your desire to always be pleased.

With "a mind within the mind", it's the same. A more primordial state of mind always *simultaneously* underlies all the more particular moods that may arise, and so you must discern that at the "core" of all the other moods and emotions that you're experiencing. Particularly relevant in this case is, as the *satipaṭṭhāna* Sutta describes, recognizing a mind that is either affected with or free from lust, aversion, and delusion. This is how you would begin to see what actually determines something as unwholesome, which is when that "core" has lust, aversion and delusion in it and you're taking it for granted and acting out of it. Without seeing that "center" as that which determines your more particular experiences and actions, you would fall into the common idea that it's the way you move, talk and the specific thoughts you're having which serve as the criteria for what is unwholesome. You could then become perfectly restrained, gentle and polite in your outward expression, even never really have lustful or hateful thoughts, but you would fail to see that at the "center" of *all that* is a state of mind affected with craving whose sway you are still under.

With *dhammas* it's more varied, but to give an example, you would see the sense bases as the "center" and everything else as surrounding that. Only by not seeing that that's the actual center that is just being "hit" by sense objects, and thus automatically *being* the center oneself, can there be lust or aversion towards sense experiences. And that's also how the hindrances work: they hinder you because you don't even recognize their "center", thus everything you do is blindly going with the grain of those hindrances, even the Dhamma practice. It's not because of the center itself or what "surrounds" that center, which is why it's futile to try to stop one's thinking, concentrate on something else, etc., intentionally arouse feelings of joy, etc.[201]

> *And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects? Here a bhikkhu abides contemplating a phenomenon within phenomena in terms of the five hindrances. And how does a bhikkhu abide contemplating a phenomenon within phenomena in terms of the five hindrances? Here, there being sensual desire* ******internally*******, a bhikkhu understands: 'There is sensual desire *****internally*******'; or there being no sensual desire *****internally*******, he understands: 'There is no sensual desire *****internally*******'; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of unarisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of abandoned sensual desire. [and so on for the rest]'*
>
> —MN 10, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

When that simultaneous *relationship* is seen,[202] whether in terms of the body, feelings, mind or phenomena,

[201] See relevant talk: Seeing Through The Hindrances Instead of Denying Them

[202] Relationship which will only be obscured by focusing on an object. This would only serve to sustain the sense of **me** being at the

it becomes inconceivable to exercise a sense of ownership over *both* thing[1] and thing[2], the sum of which nothing can possibly be outside of. You now see that *you* cannot be that center even if you wanted to, and body[1], which is clearly not yours, becomes the "center" instead. Same principle applies to the other *satipaṭṭhānas.* They render ownership redundant and inconceivable.

This "ownership becoming inconceivable" point cannot be emphasized enough, given that it's possible for people to think that, because they can now apparently overcome the sense of self by "applying" some practice, they therefore have right mindfulness or became *sotāpannas.* This is not it. It is entirely out of the question for the assumption of self and its associated suffering to ever arise again if "body within the body", etc., has been understood—*even* if one doesn't do any meditation for the rest of one's life[203]. This is precisely the reason that the Buddha had to constantly urge Noble disciples not to become complacent, which would be unimaginable for one whose idea of *sati* hinges on habits and practices (*sīlabbataparāmāsa),* without which the progress they made collapses. The capacity to see "a body within the body" makes such things lose all importance.

*"But, venerable sir, in what way can a bhikkhu be called skilled in what is possible and what is impossible?"*

> *"Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could view any formation as permanent—there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might view some formation as permanent—there is such a possibility.' He understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could view any formation as pleasurable—there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might view some formation as pleasurable—there is such a possibility.' He understands:* ******'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could view anything as self—there is no such possibility.'****** *And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might view something as self—there is such a possibility.'*
>
> —MN 115, The Various Elements

Being able to see a body within the body, a feeling within feelings, a mind within the mind, and a phenomenon within phenomena is also what puts an end to the four fundamental assumptions in regard to the aggregates, one of which a *puthujjana* will inevitably have at any given time.

> *"How, householder, is one afflicted in body and afflicted in mind? Here, householder, the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the Noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who is not a seer of superior persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma,* ******regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as within self, or self as within form.******* He lives stuck in the notions: 'I am form, form is mine.'*
>
> *As he lives stuck in these notions, that form of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, there arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. He regards feelings… perceptions… intentions… consciousness…"*
>
> —SN 22.1, Nakula's Father

On the other hand, the instructed Noble disciple, the stream-enterer or higher, is "well-instructed" and "Noble" because they've seen that what is "within" form[2] cannot be anything but form[1], and that *even* if they chose to embrace either of them and call it "mine and mine alone", it would not actually be *assumed (upādāna)* as such on the level that matters, because, even in a mundane sense, assuming things is made possible only by the lack of knowledge. Once you *know*, you cannot fool yourself again even if you try.

> *"Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: Within the seen, there will be only the seen. Within the heard, only the heard. Within the sensed, only the sensed. Within the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there is only the seen within the seen, only the heard within*

core of the experience and looking at it.

[203] This is a good litmus test for the Right View and Right Recollection: if you put aside ******everything****** you've learned about the Dhamma and all the information, habits, and practices you've acquired, and abandon all efforts, including your "formal meditation", is there room to doubt that your inability to suffer and recognition of the nature of things will remain untouched? If yes, then whatever it is, it's still not the Noble *sati* that was developed, and it's important to remind oneself of that as often as possible.

*the heard, only the sensed within the sensed, only the cognized within the cognized, then, Bāhiya, you will not be "that by which" [the "center"; the master]. When you are not "that by which", there is no "you" there. When there is no "you" there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This itself is the end of suffering."*

*Through hearing this brief explanation of the Dhamma from the Blessed One, the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth right then and there was released from the outflows through non-assumption.*

—Udāna 1.10, Bāhiya Sutta

The well-known "in the seen just the seen"[204] employs the same concept of something being "inside" of something else. One must learn to see that that inner "center", where the notion of self gets established, is actually nothing more than a bundle of subtler phenomena that pertain to—and thus **depend** on and could not have arisen without[205]—what is seen. And, in turn, the seen would not be intelligible without these subtler phenomena that are "further back". These phenomena are simply less palpable, less defined thoughts, intentions, feelings, notions, memories, views, ideas, expectations, etc., which *arise as such.* If you actually discern that that more ambiguous "center" is also a manifest *thing(s)*, just subtler and on a different plane than the sense objects are, it becomes unthinkable to be the owner of the seen, despite the fact that there are very much still these less-palpable background things you ******used to****** assume as "mine" associated with the sights, that arise as "closer" than the sights themselves.

Learn how to see these background things as the center that your sights "orbit" around instead of trying to descend onto the "bare perceptions" of "raw sense data", which is, to return to the previous analogy, akin to focusing your efforts on the things orbiting the black hole rather than on your ignorance of it.

Lastly, what allows one to truly see those two simultaneous planes and thus get the Right View, be it in terms of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* or "the seen within the seen", is to have been practicing the Gradual Training—living virtuously, withdrawn from sensuality and not delighting in the company of others—for a long time. Unrestrained actions ("me here" seeking the pleasant objects "yonder") and unnecessary company ("me here" and other people "yonder") automatically abolish right perspective and maintain the sense of self: the notion of ******me****** being the center, pressured to act towards the things "around me". It is because people continue reinforcing the sense of self through such actions that they then feel the need to *abolish* the "center" altogether when it's time to practice, and are thus unable to see the Middle Way, devoting themselves to the hopeless battle of denial instead, which can only provide trivial, temporary rewards.

*The four establishments of mindfulness, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the four establishments of mindfulness? It should be said: the three kinds of good conduct. The three kinds of good conduct, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the three kinds of good conduct? It should be said: restraint of the sense faculties*

—AN 10.61, Ignorance

*Bhikkhus, (1) it is impossible that a bhikkhu who delights in company, who is delighted with company, who is devoted to delight in company; who delights in a group, who is delighted with a group, who is devoted to delight in a group, will find delight in solitude when he is alone. (2) It is impossible that one who does not find delight in solitude when he is alone will acquire the hint of the mind. (3) It is impossible that one who does not acquire the hint of the mind will fulfill the Right View. (4) It is impossible that one who does not fulfill the Right View will fulfill Right Composure. (5) It is impossible that one who does not fulfill Right Composure will abandon the fetters. (6) Without having abandoned the fetters, it is impossible that one will realize Nibbāna.*

[204] This has nothing to do with the celebrated and fallacious idea of "bare perceptions", often linked with the practice of "noting" and similar, which is underlain by the wrong view that liberation is when parts of the aggregates have been magically deleted, and there are only the "pure sensations" and "pure present moment" left, as if everything else — namely thoughts, intentions, plans, preferences, concepts, ideas — was ever in itself an issue. Ironically, it is also that "everything else" that distinguishes us from animals, and gives us the ability to develop wisdom in the first place.

[205] All that's explained in this essay is synonymous with seeing *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the principle of simultaneous dependence. It's no coincidence that acquiring *sammāsati* is synonymous with seeing the Dhamma. "Whoever sees *paṭiccasamuppāda* sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees *paṭiccasamuppāda*"— MN 28.

—AN 6.68, Delight in Company

”‘ wp-block-verse Note: This way of explaining “body within body” is an equivalent alternative to the way used in my essay “The Meaning of Yoniso Manasikāra” and generally in the Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talks. I opted for this different way of describing the “within” aspect this time around given that it corresponds to the Pāli more literally. However, there is absolutely no relevant difference in the meaning conveyed, and in both paradigms what is actually being pointed at is the simultaneous principle that underlies one’s whole experience and undermines one’s ownership of it, discerning which the view of self would not be able to find room where there isn’t any. ”‘

## WHAT THE JHĀNAS ACTUALLY ARE

*By Bhikkhu Anīgha*

### A Glaring Discrepancy

One of the most notable differences among today’s Buddhist teachers and traditions is their interpretation of the *jhānas*, as well as the practices that they assert are the way to achieve them. The mutual gaps between these views are particularly wide when it comes to the first *jhāna*, due to varying ideas of what the Pali term *vitakkavicāra* refers to, the characteristic factor of the initial and arguably most crucial establishment of mind, given that all the subsequent *jhānas* are, in a manner of speaking, successive refinements of the first. The first *jhāna* that the Suttas describe is also perfectly sufficient for Arahantship (MN 64 & AN 9.36).

The foremost, generally unquestioned assumption about the practice of *jhāna* (and mental cultivation in general) is that one or another form of continuous attention upon one object is necessary, and this itself rests on the idea that *samādhi* is a state of focused attention. For this reason, the term *jhāna* has frequently been interpreted as “absorption”. The reality is, however, that such practice is not discussed, let alone *encouraged*, anywhere in the Suttas. It does not correspond to any Pali term in the early texts, and is invariably being read into them and justified heuristically, if at all. In fact, the word *jhāna* has an unambiguous meaning both in Pali and Sanskrit: thinking, contemplating, reflecting—*meditating*.[206]

The average person who is told to “meditate” would instead proceed to try to “empty their mind”, become hyper-aware of bodily sensations, and breathe deeply to achieve a bodily relaxation akin to what a massage provides. The more serious teachers and practices would then expand upon this, often in meticulous detail and with various nuances, slap Buddhist concepts and terminology into it after the fact, and present the final product as the core of the way towards *Nibbāna*.

### Why It Exists, And Why It Shouldn’t

These distorted ideas have come about due to the fact that what is widely thought of today as Buddhist meditation is, at best, for those who label themselves Early Buddhists, the result of rejecting only *some* parts of the overall framework put forth by later Buddhist Schools, the Theravada Commentaries and the *Visuddhimagga*, often unaware that the largest of all the elephants remains in the room. At worst, some base their views on later interpretations without a second thought. In either case, the premise that the gist of mental cultivation is concentration upon objects is rarely challenged, despite the critical Western attitude often being willing to strip basically everything else away from Buddhism.[207]

[206] The original meaning of this word makes it an excellent translation for “*jhāyati*/*jhāna*”. Unfortunately, however, since the advent of concentration-centric meditation techniques in the West, the term has acquired alien connotations to its original latin etymology of *meditārī* (”to ponder on, to think over, consider”). More often than not, it is used to refer to the exact opposite effort: *stopping* one’s thinking and consideration, “cutting off the narrative” in one’s mind, and focusing instead on bodily sensations or similar “more real” phenomena. The state thought of as *jhāna* (again, “meditation”) that results from this repetitive focusing and re-focusing is then, contradictorily, the *inability* to meditate, and provides one a sense of peace more akin to a blissful oblivion than that of abandoning passion for sense experiences through *meditating* on their true nature, which is what results in the first *jhāna*.

[207] The emphasis on mechanical focusing techniques is invariably what survives even in the most “secular” presentations of Buddhist meditation, and it’s also what mystics in eternalist religions would tend to practice, just with a different accessory narrative underpinning the need for focusing on the chosen object. It would follow that these mystics are not *that* far away from *sammāsamādhi* despite often engaging in wrong action and wrong livelihood, as are many who are fervently devoted to Buddhist meditation techniques too, unaware of the inherent contradiction.

It is overlooked that if one were to have a person wholly unfamiliar with meditation and Buddhist ideas—say, an average European from the 18th century equipped with a perfectly literal Pali dictionary, who will take what they read on its own terms and not those of Christianity or any other religion—read through the collection of early texts exclusively, without being told what they mean in advance (as most of us today are way before we actually read them), there is simply no way that they would come to the conclusion that the Buddhist path to liberation centers around stopping one's thinking and/or watching bodily sensations. But modern practitioners, by the time they bother to read the Suttas (if they ever do), are already quite invested in that overall direction due to having had previous success with a contemporary "meditation" technique. This results in them inadvertently only being open to (mis)reading the Suttas in ways that support or at least do not invalidate what they have circumstantially come to regard as the Dhamma.

Instead, this individual of a previous era who is free from such biases and conflicts of interest would likely conclude, judging by the sheer frequency of mentions, that the Buddha's main injunction is to *meditate* diligently (in the right sense of the word) on what is beneficial (*kusala*) and what is unbeneficial (*akusala*), and that the cultivation of the former and abandoning of the latter is done first and foremost through undertaking the precepts and restraint in regard to one's desires, and moreover, by *meditating* on the unreliable and perilous nature of everything that one is, to one's own detriment, emotionally dependent on—particularly sensual pleasures. And this would be a merely intellectual yet authentic and undistorted conclusion by someone who still has no plan to actually implement those teachings.

> *Having abandoned these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom,* ******quite******* *******withdrawn from sensuality*******, withdrawn from unwholesome states, he abides having entered the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, with joy and pleasure born of seclusion.*
>
> *—MN 39, Great Discourse at Assapura*

> *And how, bhikkhus, are sensual pleasures seen by a bhikkhu in such a way that as he looks at them*****s*******ensual desire, sensual affection, sensual infatuation, and sensual passion do not lie latent within him in regard to sensual pleasures?* ******Suppose there is a charcoal pit deeper than a man's height, filled with glowing coals without flame or smoke.******* A man would come along wanting to live, not wanting to die, desiring happiness and averse to suffering. Then two strong men would grab him by both arms and drag him towards the charcoal pit. The man would wriggle his body this way and that. For what reason? Because he knows: 'I will fall into this charcoal pit and I will thereby meet death or deadly suffering.' So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has seen sensual pleasures as similar to a charcoal pit, sensual desire, sensual affection, sensual infatuation, and sensual passion do not lie latent within him in regard to sensual pleasures. *****(********i.e. he is able to establish the first jhāna.)******

> *"And how, bhikkhus, has a bhikkhu comprehended a mode of conduct and manner of dwelling in such a way that as he conducts himself thus and as he dwells thus, evil unbeneficial states of longing and aversion do not flow in upon him* ******[which would obstruct jhāna]*******? Suppose a man would enter a thorny forest. There would be thorns in front of him, thorns behind him, thorns to his left, thorns to his right, thorns below him, thorns above him. He would go forward mindfully, he would go back mindfully, thinking, 'May no thorn prick me!' So too, bhikkhus, whatever in the world has a pleasing and agreeable nature is called a thorn in the Noble One's Discipline. Having understood this thus as 'a thorn', restraint and non-restraint should be understood.*
>
> *—SN 35.244, Things that Entail Suffering*

******(Ānāpāna)sati**** is… "Observation"?**

Another cause of the widespread misconceptions about what meditation and *jhānas* are is the centrality given to what can be called "breath observation", which means that virtually any other practice is done in a manner analogous to it, i.e., by *focusing* on something, even if it's not static, such as a changing stream of bodily sensations or images of people one is radiating loving-kindness towards—in the end it's still done with the purpose of *narrowing down* one's awareness, however much the degree of narrow-ness varies.

The point here is not that *ānāpānāsati* is wrong, but that *observing sensations* of breathing, being either at one single point or throughout one's whole body, or whatever arbitrary variation of this "observing", is ******not****** what *ānāpānāsati* is, nor does it have anything to do with *sati* in general.

*Ānāpānāsati* is mentioned only a handful of times in the Suttas compared to the types of contemplations mentioned in the previous quoted passage, and there is ample reason to believe that a vast number of monastic disciples[208] had never received detailed instruction on it, if at all. Therefore, instead of taking *ānāpānāsati* and the modern ideas of it as the starting point, one should actually interpret *ānāpānāsati* in the light of the other comparatively enormous bulk of *right reflections* aimed at understanding[209] the nature of things that the Buddha left behind, which are instead seen as *supplementary*, if at all considered. On top of this, the standard contemplation that is given in the context of *jhāna* is not *ānāpānasati*, but the recognition of the drawbacks of sensuality and its concomitant unbeneficial states. Thus, when you have *pondered/meditated on* the drawbacks of sensuality correctly, your mind abides having entered the meditation/**state-of-comprehension** (*jhāna*)[210] that sees sensuality as a "charcoal pit", and is accompanied by profound joy, pleasure and *relief* born of the safety from those burning embers. In this way, to use an analogy, planting **apple** seeds—not *something else*—provides you with an apple tree, and apples eventually.

**Coherent, Doable, Free From "Patchwork"**

When *jhāna*/meditation is understood in this way throughout, *everything* in the 4 Nikāyas forms a coherent whole, and one does away with the otherwise lurking implication that the Buddha spent decades traveling far and wide teaching things that were only secondarily relevant compared to the supposed crux of the matter, which is absorption into bodily sensations with little to no thinking. Given that he tirelessly instructed people to be diligent and meditate ardently, it would follow that they would not be able to even make use of the vast array of discursive reflections he taught if the practice is about rendering oneself *unable to meditate* as much as possible. Instead, he would've been much better off leaving behind something more akin to a modern meditation manual and calling it a day, given that he was already not too eager to teach when asked to soon after his enlightenment.

We also do away with the notion that meditation, *jhāna* and enlightenment by extension, and dealing with day-to-day affairs are fundamentally at odds,[211] which is certainly the case when your idea of "deep *samādhi*" requires you to not skip a beat in your alertness to every moment and (supposedly) not engage with concepts to sustain it—essentially tying you down more than it's freeing you.

What *jhāna* practice *does* demand from you without exception is that you completely abandon *delight* in the five cords of sensual pleasure (not become unaware of them)—physically, verbally, and mentally—spend the majority of your time away from the presence of others, and refrain from using company as a form of entertainment when you do meet people due to practical necessities. This is exactly why the Suttas go on incessantly about the need for withdrawal from sensuality and seclusion from company—valuable space that could've been used to, *at least once*, mention these special object-observation techniques that magically bypass that need, making *samādhi* accessible to anyone who simply devotes time to them regularly, rendering monasticism effectively unnecessary except for the odd person who is perhaps too zealous about the practice.

> *Bhikkhus, without having abandoned six things, one is* ******incapable******* of entering and dwelling in the first jhāna. What six? Sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, doubt; and* ******not having clearly seen with correct wisdom, as it really is, the danger in sensual pleasures.******* Without having abandoned these six things, one is incapable of

[208] There are no recorded instances of the Buddha teaching *ānāpānasati* to even his most devoted lay disciples who were stream-enterers. The authentic *ānāpānasati* presupposes a willingness to renounce *everything*, given that it's an acute contemplation of non-control and impermanence. Hence the *Ānāpānasati Sutta, MN 118*, was received by a group exclusively consisting of attained *bhikkhus*.

[209] The *ānāpānāsati Sutta* itself instructs one to *understand (pajānāti,* which is no less than the verb form of *paññā)* one's act of breathing and the (un-ownable) body that's revealed indirectly by it. This would lead to the same result as other contemplations like the recollection of death—complete dispassion towards existence that is greatly peaceful, unburdening and joyful for one who *values it*. And this is what the *jhānas* are, not sudden meditative experiences which are accessible to people who are not dispassionate if they just get lucky or do the right technique at the right time.

[210] This would be an accurate rendering of the term. See further below on how "comprehension" differs from liberative insight.

[211] See AN 3.63, walking, standing, lying down during *jhāna*.

entering and dwelling in the first jhāna.*

> *Bhikkhus, having abandoned six things, one is capable of entering and dwelling in the first jhāna. What six? Sensual desire … not having clearly seen with correct wisdom, as it really is, the danger in sensual pleasures. Having abandoned these six things, one is capable of entering and dwelling in the first jhāna."*
>
> *—AN 6.73, On The First Jhāna*

With all this in mind, we can go on to elaborate further on the nature of the four "pleasant abidings here-&-now" and how contemplation done rightly and persistently naturally results in them, with no need for extraneous props.

******Meditation**** is Concrete Thinking**

To start off with, the first thing one is likely to wonder is what is the difference between the practice of meditation in this correct sense, and rehearsing abstract ideas and views one has read or heard about, which clearly anyone can do without experiencing the wholesome joy of relief from all that is unwholesome. The fact that people cannot see that distinction and thus end up doing the latter form of abstract pondering is one of the main reasons that they opt for the "more palpable" observation of bodily sensations and similar practices instead.

What one needs to start getting used to is *concrete thinking*, which is the sort of thinking that develops the mind towards Right View and Right Recollection (*sati*). "Concrete" in the sense that one reflects, meditates on, thinks and ponders about the nature of a phenomenon *while* it is present, as opposed to dwelling on an abstract notion of "sensual pleasures are bad", which, sure enough, would not result in anything of real value.

This brings us to another massive shortcoming in the usual approach towards *samādhi*, which is built around trying to get rid of "mind-wandering", as it's called. Truly recognizing the danger in the 5 cords of sensual pleasure *requires* them to present themselves as mental phenomena. That is what allows one to think about their perilous nature *concretely*, and for the contemplation not to revolve around abstract notions that have no practical relevance to when real desires arise. Only then can one start to realize the *gratification* and *danger* in those phenomena while they persist, without which any apparent *escape* will be illusory. When the mind is taken by desire, one should, instead of cowering away by focusing on something else[212], interpret that as a symptom of the mind not having sufficient clarity and confidence regarding the nature of pleasant experiences—which is what is being overlooked whenever one delights in them—and then get to work with *developing* that clarity and address the problem at its root[213]. This clarity/confidence being referred to is precisely what elevates the mind to the level of the first *jhāna*, not a meticulous manipulation of what objects and thoughts arise.

> *Therein, bhikkhus, a noble disciple* ******reflects******* thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come—both alike are Māra's realm, Māra's domain, Māra's bait, Māra's hunting ground. On account of them, these evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and aggression arise, and they constitute an obstruction to a noble disciple in training here. Suppose I were to abide with a******* *******mind abundant and exalted, having transcended the world and made a firm determination with the mind. When I do so, there will be no more evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and aggression in me, and with the abandoning of them my mind will be unlimited, immeasurable, and well developed.' When he practices in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind *****acquires******* *******confidence******* in this base. Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves [upon it] with wisdom. On the dissolution of the body, after death, it is possible that the evolving

[212] Many approaches acknowledge that forcefully re-focusing the mind is unhelpful, yet ultimately still insist on the fact that the concentration object is helpful to *any* extent. The word *nimitta* in the first strategy of MN 20, sometimes used to justify this view, does not mean "object", but more like "background context" in this case, which is what *meditating upon something* leads to, and **this** dispels unskilful states if the cultivated context is right (and increases them if it's wrong). See SN 12.54.

[213] See Sīla is Samādhi for a detailed example of how one would develop that clarity in regard to the things one has gotten used to not acting out of well beforehand.

consciousness may pass on to the imperturbable. This, bhikkhus, is declared to be the first way directed to the imperturbable.*

*—MN 106, Suitable for the Imperturbable*

******Samatha**** is No Exception**

"The Imperturbable" is a term used to refer to the fourth *jhāna* at minimum, which means that this contemplation alone is sufficient to arrive at it eventually, once that full clarity being described is reached. At no point is it said that it's necessary to abandon the aspect of reflective clarity and become absorbed in more rudimentary phenomena instead. Quite the opposite. This Sutta, which contains the most explicit description of how to enter formless attainments further down, proves how even those much more refined states are attained by *reflecting and considering* certain themes until the mind becomes confident in them. What is then to be said of someone whose idea of the very first *jhāna* involves trying to abolish their capacity to reflect on anything? That's quite literally not "meditation" at all.

What the Sutta above is describing is undeniably *samatha* practice, and how it is done through *contemplation/meditation*, not through holding an object in one's mind for a period of time[214] and getting "locked" into it. *Ānāpānasati, kasiṇas, brahmavihāras, satipaṭṭhānas, jhānas,* formless attainments, cessation of perception-&-feeling—all are developed through concrete reflection that sheds *clarity* onto those phenomena being reflected upon. In the SN 40 series, Ven. Mahāmoggallāna goes through the entire succession of nine meditative attainments by first *clarifying* what they are and what qualities define them. There is no mention of some secondary concentration method that he had to implement, in which case he should've stuck to that and just stayed in the "present moment", instead of allowing these unnecessary concepts and "wandering thoughts" to preoccupy him, which, according to contemporary views generally, would be distractions and obstacles at the time of striving towards *samādhi.*

**"Comprehension"/Jhāna vs. Liberative Insight**

One will surely wonder, however: what is the difference between the contemplation and clarity that the *jhānas* and *samatha* in general involve, and the discernment of, say, the Four Noble Truths and Three Characteristics?

The straightforward answer is that the reflections that develop *jhāna* are directed at certain classes of phenomena of progressively refined nature, whereas in the noble insight that destroys the fetters, it's the nature of *phenome*na *as such*, in the utmost general sense, that has been brought to light. This is well illustrated in MN 106 quoted above, where one is reflecting on the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of *sensual pleasures specifically*, which is the theme of contemplation that enables one to acquire the fourth *jhāna* and beyond once one is fully skilled in it.

One can certainly attempt to reflect on the nature of phenomena in general, e.g. of the five aggregates, right off the bat, and this would *indirectly* clarify the nature of the phenomena relevant to the *jhānas* , but it can be more beneficial to tackle the "dust in one's eyes" directly, especially sensuality, rather than attempting to see clearly with dusty eyes (SN 35.246). But it's not a hard and fast rule, and both avenues would contribute in their own way to the overall cultivation of the mind and wisdom.

Furthermore, as MN 64 and several others explain, once the comprehension of these specific phenomena that gives rise to *jhāna* is brought to fulfillment and the mind is perfectly pliable and free from obstructions, one then goes on to meditate on the nature of that entirely wholesome experience, and this necessarily brings to light the nature of *all* phenomena, to the extent necessary for fetters to be destroyed, which are not necessarily addressed by the initial meditation upon the danger of sensuality, etc.[215] As the Sutta explains,

[214]If one goes back to square one, and starts reading the Suttas on their own terms having put aside preconceived notions, as the total newcomer described earlier would, one will not find a single instance of the Buddha even mentioning such a thing, not even as a "useful tool". It completely falls outside the scope of *samatha* and the Path as a whole, and the releases and insights it can give rise to are not the right ones that contribute to *permanent and irreversible* freedom. Its results are delicate, guaranteed to fade if you don't practice for not even that long, whereas the changes that the actual *jhānas,* not to mention noble attainments, effect on the mind survive even neurological disorders, amnesia and death itself..

[215]This does not mean that one can be "attached to *jhāna*" as is often believed. As MN 64 says, the very first *jhāna* is reached through "withdrawal from appropriation" (*upadhiviveka)*, which is why it's impossible for *jhānas* to be responsible for any unwholesome states.

this would lead to the destruction of the five lower fetters, not only to stream-entry, which one cannot "stay" at if skilled in *jhānas*.

Thus, right reflection is at the core of both *samatha* and *vipassanā*. *Samatha* simply involves a specialized form of contemplation aimed at the things that defile the mind, clearing the obstacles for *vipassanā* to take root. However, if one doesn't know how and what things must be discerned, one will fail to contemplate properly so that the mind gets purified to begin with.

> *There is no jhāna without discernment, no discernment without jhāna.*
>
> *One who has jhāna and discernment—they're in the presence of Nibbānȧ.*
>
> *—Dhammapada 372*[216]

******Jhāna**** Needed for Stream-Entry?**

What's been said so far will also serve to shed some light on a familiar controversy among modern Buddhists, which is whether *jhāna* is necessary for the attainment of stream-entry, given that a *sotāpanna* is said to possess *sammāsamādhi,* which is defined as the four *jhānas.* The solution to the seeming conundrum is that a stream-enterer, due to having first and foremost seen the danger in sensuality (see AN 6.73 above & MN 14) on account of seeing the origin of *dukkha*, and furthermore due to being able to recognize the hints of their mind *(cittassa nimitta)*, which is the basis for any mind-development as per SN 47.8, has the *faculty* to meditate on the nature of sensuality correctly, in its full extent, and no longer confuses playing around with ideas and right reflection. Such a person has developed the *concrete thinking* described earlier, which is essentially the enlightenment factor of *dhammavicaya*[217]. Hence, when they reflect on the nature of sensuality and unwholesome states, or on the fundamental truths they understood, they are practicing *jhāna,* even if they're still not aware of it and have not obtained the wholesome pleasure of detachment from sensuality yet, which can take a while (AN 3.94, MN 14). This cannot be said for the *puthujjana*, who still does not see what the defilements are, let alone the way out of them. Thus, it is because of their Right View that they have Right Effort and Right Recollection, and whenever those two are present, the possibility of *jhāna* also is, though one may not have brought it to realization yet.

> *"Lady, what is composure (samādhi)? What is the basis of composure? What is the equipment of composure? What is the development of composure?"*
>
> *"Unification of mind (citta-ekaggatā)*[218]*, friend Visākha, is composure; the four foundations of mindfulness*[219] *are the basis of composure; the four right kinds of striving are the equipment of composure; the repetition, development, and cultivation of these same states is the development of composure therein.*
>
> *—MN 44*
>
> *Bhikkhus, if, even for a fingersnap, a bhikkhu cultivates Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollectedness and Right Composure, I say that he is called a bhikkhu who is* ******not devoid of jhāna*******, who follows the Teacher's instructions, who responds to advice, and who does not eat the country's alms in vain. How much more so those who make much of it!"*
>
> *—AN 1.431-438 (SuttaCentral numbering)*

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It's simply that if one doesn't take that same practice further, which requires instruction on *anattā* from a Buddha or a disciple, one will only be free from sensuality but not from self-view/conceit, i.e. still a *puthujjana.* Contemporary *"jhāna"*, however, does not even result in freedom from the former, as many would acknowledge if they're self-honest.

[216] Obviously, either of these two mutually reinforcing qualities can be somewhat ahead of the other depending on the person's tendencies, but that's not how it's usually taken, i.e., as two completely different things, to the point of requiring different techniques and *modus operandi*.

[217] See SN 46.30 on how all the seven *bojjhaṅgas* are acquired *with* stream-entry, not before, as tends to be conveniently believed.

[218] This term *ekaggatā* has often been translated in an extremely misleading manner as "one-pointedness". The truth is that the word *agga* in Pali does not mean "point" *anywhere* in the early texts, and the notion gets extraneously inserted to accommodate modern views. *Agga* rather means "tip, top, peak" and even "room, place". In the first *jhāna, ekaggatā* refers to the "one room" or "one peak" that the mind abides in, the "one apex" of one's experience, which is the way of regarding sense pleasures described in MN 106 above. The overarching theme or "peak" for the ordinary person is the opposite: welcoming sensuality.

[219] See my previous essay on the four *satipaṭṭhānas*—the four frameworks of right contemplation.

**"But… What About The Cessation of** ****** Vitakka-Vicāra****?"**

Now, one may object that this concept of *samatha* in general being all about contemplation of the correct themes is incompatible with the fact that there is no thinking-and-pondering present from the second *jhāna* onwards. The answer to that is that one's conception of right contemplation is not accurate unless one is already able to enter the first *jhāna* (which is highly unlikely to happen before stream-entry today if it is to be the real deal)[220] and thus one will not be able to conceive of how the aspect of reflection and consideration of phenomena is present, in increasing levels of refinement, all the way up to the cessation of perception and feeling. If one has not learned to take the hint of one's mind (*cittassa nimitta),* it is impossible for one to understand what right contemplation is, and how it can be done without the coarse philosophizing and theorizing which is all that one knows as "contemplation".

Nevertheless, suffice it to say that when you choose to go against the grain of your desires to keep the precepts and be sense-restrained—being clear about their true purpose as well, not just mechanically—there is a nascent form of that contemplation whether you recognize it at the time or not, although you may not be actively philosophizing about how "sensuality is bad" every time you restrain yourself from acting out of it.[221]

> *"But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfil true knowledge and liberation?" "The seven factors of enlightenment, Kuṇḍaliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfil true knowledge and liberation.""But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment?" "The four establishments of recollection, Kuṇḍaliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment." "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the four establishments of recollection?" "*******The three kinds of good conduct, Ku********ṇḍ********aliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the four establishments of recollection."***** "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the three kinds of good conduct?"* "******Restraint of the sense faculties, Ku********ṇḍ********aliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfils the three kinds of good conduct.******
>
> *"And how, Kuṇḍaliya, is restraint of the sense faculties developed and cultivated so that it fulfils the three kinds of good conduct? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, having seen an agreeable form with the eye, a bhikkhu does not long for it, or become excited by it, or generate lust for it. His body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated. But having seen a disagreeable form with the eye, he is not dismayed by it, not daunted, not dejected, without ill will. His body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated.*
>
> *"Further, Kuṇḍaliya, having heard an agreeable sound with the ear … having smelt an agreeable odour with the nose … having savoured an agreeable taste with the tongue … having felt an agreeable tactile object with the body … having cognized an agreeable mental phenomenon with the mind, a bhikkhu does not long for it, or become excited by it, or generate lust for it. But having cognized a disagreeable mental phenomenon with the mind, he is not dismayed by it, not daunted, not dejected, without ill will. His body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated.*
>
> *"When, Kuṇḍaliya, after he has seen a form with the eye, a bhikkhu's body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated in regard to both agreeable and disagreeable forms; when, after he has heard a sound with the ear … smelt an odour with the nose … savoured a taste with the tongue … felt a tactile object with the body … cognized a mental phenomenon with the mind, a bhikkhu's body is*

[220] MN 14 shows how the layman Mahānāma, who is acknowledged to be a Noble Disciple by the Buddha, is still not able to attain *jhānas*. If it were as easy as it's thought of these days, to the point where many ordinary people can get anywhere close to it in the span of a 10-day retreat, it would make no sense for someone who is already so far ahead in their practice—an *enlightened being,* no less, who possesses the seven enlightenment factors—to not be able to enter *jhāna.* Same goes for Ven. Mahāmoggallāna, who initially struggled with his *samādhi* in AN 7.61 and throughout SN 40, and for every lay stream-enterer who was not celibate, which, as MN 14 proves, would be impossible if they had been proficient in at least the first *jhāna.* Non-celibacy for such a person is just as far-fetched as willingly stepping back into a charcoal pit, as the simile goes, having already recognized it for what it is and finally experienced the relief of getting away from it.

[221] Refer to **Sīla is Samādhi** for more on how unwavering commitment to virtue and restraint already involves comprehension of the right things in its foundational degree. This contains a list of Dhamma talks on the topic of *cittassa nimitta,* which is what enables "concrete thinking", and also is the necessary factor for virtue to go beyond a mere habit.

*steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated in regard to both agreeable and disagreeable mental phenomena, then his restraint of the sense faculties has been developed and cultivated in such a way that it fulfils the three kinds of good conduct.*

*"And how, Kuṇḍaliya, are the three kinds of good conduct developed and cultivated so that they fulfil the four establishments of recollection? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, having abandoned bodily misconduct, a bhikkhu develops good bodily conduct; having abandoned verbal misconduct, he develops good verbal conduct; having abandoned mental misconduct, he develops good mental conduct. It is in this way that the three kinds of good conduct are developed and cultivated so that they fulfil the four establishments of recollection.*

*"And how, Kuṇḍaliya, are the four establishments of recollection developed and cultivated so that they fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings … mind in mind … phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. It is in this way that the four establishments of recollection are developed and cultivated so that they fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment.*

*—SN 46.6, Kuṇḍaliya*

******Jhāna**** First, Renunciation Later?**

MN 14, which has already been referred to above, contains a passage that has led to mistaken conclusions regarding the proper order of the practice of *jhāna:*

*"Then Mahānāma the Sakyan went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and said:"Venerable sir, I have long understood the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One thus: 'Greed is an imperfection that defiles the mind, hate is an imperfection that defiles the mind, delusion is an imperfection that defiles the mind.' Yet while I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One thus, at times states of greed, hate, and delusion invade my mind and remain. I have wondered, venerable sir, what state is still unabandoned by me internally, owing to which at times these states of greed, hate, and delusion invade my mind and remain.*

*"Mahānāma, there is still a state unabandoned by you internally, owing to which at times states of greed, hate, and delusion invade your mind and remain; for were that state already abandoned by you internally you would not be living the home life, you would not be enjoying sensual pleasures. It is because that state is unabandoned by you internally that you are living the home life and enjoying sensual pleasures.*

*Even though a noble disciple has seen clearly as it actually is with proper wisdom that sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and despair, and that the danger in them is still more, as long as he still does not attain to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, he may still be attracted to sensual pleasures. But when a noble disciple has seen clearly as it actually is with proper wisdom that sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and despair, and that the danger in them is still more, and he attains to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, then he is no longer attracted to sensual pleasures.*

*"Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I too clearly saw as it actually is with proper wisdom how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them, but as long as I still did not attain to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, I recognised that I still could be attracted to sensual pleasures. But when I clearly saw as it actually is with proper wisdom how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them, and I attained to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, I recognised that I was no longer attracted to sensual pleasures."*

*—MN 14. Shorter Discourse on the Great Mass of Suffering*

This is taken by some to mean that one will only be able to achieve full restraint from sensuality *after* attaining *jhānas*, conflating "being still attracted to sensual pleasures" , which the Buddha says he initially also was, with a justification for *actions* rooted in that attraction, failing to see that the attraction is fueled further primarily *by* the actions, not some ambiguous energies that concentration practices help dissipate.

Doubtlessly, there is a lot of appeal in the idea that adherence to some "meditation" method is by itself purifying the mind from sense desire, and that this process happens in a vacuum, more or less irrespective of the actions one does "off the cushion". That, at some point down the line, one's mind will naturally not be interested in sensual pleasures anymore, so until one's skill in these "*jhānas*" matures sufficiently, one is justified in giving in to desires so as to not make the practice too difficult.

This very palatable idea disastrously gets things the wrong way round, and overlooks the true reason for the five hindrances and the lack of proper context of the nature of sensuality—the six obstacles to attaining the pleasure of dispassion as mentioned in AN 6.73 quoted earlier—ensuring that whatever comes out of one's efforts will not be true *jhāna.*

> "*I say, bhikkhus, that ignorance has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for ignorance? It should be said: the five hindrances. The five hindrances, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the five hindrances? It should be said: the three kinds of misconduct. The three kinds of misconduct, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the three kinds of misconduct? It should be said:* ******non-restraint of the sense faculties.******
>
> —*AN 10.61, Ignorance*

In addition, the chinese *Āgama* parallel to MN 14 has a more explicit take on the matter than the Pāli version:

> *At that time Mahānāma the Sakyan, while walking about after midday, approached the Buddha. Having paid homage with his head at the Buddha's feet, stepped back, and sat to one side, he said:*
>
> *World-honored One, as I understand the teaching of the World-honored One, I must bring about the cessation of the three defilements in my mind: the defilement of mind by greed, the defilement of mind by hatred, and the defilement of mind by delusion. World-honored One, [although] I understand the teaching like this, yet states of greed, states of hatred, and states of delusion still arise in my mind. World-honored One, I am thinking: What condition have I not eradicated that still causes states of greed, states of hatred, and states of delusion*
>
> *to arise in my mind?*
>
> *The World-honored One said:*
>
> *Mahānāma, [within] you there is one condition that has not been eradicated, namely [that because of which] you remain a householder, instead of leaving the household life out of faith and becoming a homeless one to practice the path. Mahānāma, if you had eradicated this one condition, you would certainly not remain a householder but would certainly leave the household life out of faith and become a homeless one to practice the path. It is because this one condition has not been eradicated that you have remained a householder instead of leaving the household life out of faith and becoming a homeless one to practice the path. […]*
>
> *Mahānāma, it should be understood that there is no happiness at all in sensual pleasures; [there is only] immeasurable suffering and misery.* ******If a learned noble disciple does not see this as it really is, then he is enveloped by sensual pleasures and will not attain the happiness of relinquishment and unsurpassable peace.******
>
> *Mahānāma, in this way a learned noble disciple* ******regresses******* because of sensual pleasures. Mahānāma, I know that there is no happiness in sensual pleasures, but only immeasurable misery. Knowing this as it really is, Mahānāma, I am not enveloped by sensual pleasures and not overcome by what is unbeneficial, and so I attain the happiness of relinquishment and unsurpassable peace. Mahānāma, for this reason I do not regress because of sensual pleasures.*
>
> —Madhyama Āgama 100, The Second Discourse on the Mass of Suffering

******Do As You Think, Think As You Do**********

Given that the *jhānas* are achieved primarily through reflections such as the one of regarding sensual pleasures as undesirable, the fact that meditation (again, in the original meaning of that word) and thus *samādhi* is incompatible with sensual behavior becomes a no-brainer. You can't be (in good faith) reflecting on how sensual pleasures are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and constitute an obstacle when your day-to-day actions are still outlets for sensual desire, and prove your underlying view of it as satisfactory and beneficial.

Reflecting honestly, you would realize that the first step in truly meditating on that theme, which is the basis for the first *jhāna* as a whole host of Suttas point out (DN 2, MN 19, MN 20, MN 39, MN 75, MN 106, SN 35.244, SN 35.246… to name just a few), is to *actually* stop stepping on the "traps" of the five cords of sensuality intentionally. Not doing so and then trying to develop this meditation would be not only hypocritical but also futile, since by delighting in sense pleasure, one is falling away from the wholesome states the Buddha taught, and even more so as a *puthujjana,* who intrinsically does not see wholesome as wholesome clearly. Regardless of one's views and wishes, the polar opposite of the meditation praised by the Buddha is being cultivated*:*

> "*Bhikkhus, I will teach you about one who is subject to decline, about one who is not subject to decline, and about the six mastered bases. Listen to that….*
>
> "*And how, bhikkhus, is one subject to decline? Here, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has seen a form with the eye, there arise in him evil unwholesome states, memories and intentions connected with the fetters. If the bhikkhu tolerates them and does not abandon them, dispel them, put an end to them, and obliterate them,*****  he should understand this thus: 'I am declining away from wholesome states. For this has been called decline by the Blessed One.'**********
>
> "*Further, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has heard a sound with the ear … cognized a mental phenomenon with the mind, there arise in him evil unwholesome states, memories and intentions connected with the fetters. If the bhikkhu tolerates them and does not abandon them, dispel them, put an end to them, and obliterate them, he should understand this thus: 'I am declining away from wholesome states. For this has been called decline by the Blessed One.'*
>
> "*It is in such a way, bhikkhus, that one is subject to decline.*
>
> *—SN 35.96, Decline*

**Two Mutually Exclusive "Abidings"**

Once a person begins to abide peacefully in the right meditation that is utterly purified of sensual desire, it will begin to sink in that they have always been a "meditator" all along, whether they realized it or not. The lustful, averse, lethargic, restless and doubtful mind is also an *abiding* that results from one's "meditation" upon the theme of sensual pleasures, ill-will and distractions as valuable and worthwhile, and one's unrestrained bodily and verbal actions are just the outpours of that theme of meditation. Fostering that theme makes one increasingly abide "quite assailed with sensuality, quite infected with unwholesome states, with fantasizing-and-longing, in the pain and suffering born of attachment"—state which the whole world mistakenly regards as joyous and exciting when external things *happen* to go well.

Trying to remedy this situation by concentrating upon an object, successfully as one may, is shortsighted and of no real use, because it's still happening within the "meditation" that the ignorant mind has always been doing under the hood, no matter how many overwhelmingly pleasant and seemingly spiritually relevant experiences it may provide (only *sometimes*, to boot), and how well it temporarily distracts you from the coarser pleasures that you would *otherwise* be craving for, as usual.

## The Nature of Ignorance

by *Bhikkhu Anīgha*

In order to fix any problem, one needs to have an accurate idea of what that problem is. With the ultimate issue that is *avijjā*, this is even more the case, as a wrong view about what ignorance is will necessarily mean

striving towards an insight, and even liberation, of the wrong kind—namely, pertaining to something that is not actually the root of one's suffering.

Contemporarily, the view that practitioners hold for the most part is that ignorance is a lack of access to some great secret or "ultimate reality" underlying their experience. As a result of this, the sort of "insight" being aimed at is on the level of a special *perception* or revelatory *experience*, a common example being the idea of a hidden "flux" or "stream" of changing phenomena which—once a subtle bit of reasoning and information has been applied, meaning it's not a direct insight—"means" that experience is *anattā*[222] .

The knowledge that a *puthujjana* is truly missing out on is something comparatively unexciting and less superficially grandiose than the insights practitioners tend to anticipate and glorify, but immeasurably more fundamental and indispensable for any development of mind to take place. So fundamental, in fact, that the lack of said recognition ensures and maintains itself, meaning that there is no way for the right type of insight to arise "by accident" or "naturally", unlike special visions and meditative experiences that can happen even on account of drugs. The truly supramundane "vision" the ordinary person lacks pertains simply to their own intentions, to knowing them when and for what they are.

> *"Bhante, they speak of 'an astute person with great understanding'. How is an astute person with great understanding defined?"*
>
> *"Good, good, bhikkhu! Your approach and articulation are excellent, and it's a good question. … An astute person with great understanding is one who does not intend in a way that leads to their own harm, to the harm of others, or to the harm of both. When they think, they only think in a way that is beneficial for themselves, for others, for both, and for the whole world. That's how a person is astute, with great understanding."*
>
> *—AN 4.186*

The *puthujjana*, defined as the person who lacks understanding, is unable to ensure their internal welfare because they themselves inadvertently intend in ways that jeopardize it, and there are only two possible reasons behind this: 1) they have not even a concept of what their true welfare is, meaning they've never come across the Dhamma, understood it intellectually and acknowledged it as true, or 2) they are unable to see unbeneficial intentions *as they are taking place* in their own mind, even if they're well-learned and fully devoted to the teachings.

It is because of this that it is said…

> *"There are two conditions for the arising of right view: the words of another and attention through the source (*******yoniso manasikāra*******)."*
>
> *—MN 43*

We need to look no further than the first fetter for the best example of not seeing unbeneficial intentions as they take place. The person without the Right View regards their experiences as "me" and "mine" not because they *want to*, especially not if they agree with the Buddha's core teachings, as almost everyone reading this probably does. It's because one doesn't even notice that attitude taking place in the first place that it continues to take place, and that attitude, that "regarding", is nothing but an *activity/intention* (*saṅkhāra)*, meaning that the *puthujjana* is responsible for it.

> *And how, bhikkhus, does one know and see in order to immediately end the defilements with no in-between? Take an untrained ordinary person who has not seen the noble ones, and is neither skilled nor trained in*

[222] There are multiple faults with this right off the bat. The first implication this naturally carries is that *anattā* means "*no-self*", as opposed to *"not-self"*. By perceiving the unceasing flux of experience, one *concludes* that there is therefore no lasting entity that can be called a"self", failing to see that that's not even what the fetter of self-view is about in the first place. Thus, having a wrong view about what ignorance is would in this case lead to an insight of the wrong kind, as said previously. As per the *Anattālakkhana Sutta*, *anattā* is the lack of control over the aggregates and their nature of not leading to one's well-being in themselves. It has nothing to do with there being no discernible identity that endures over time, and that´s why the insight of *anattā* is always described in terms of "this is not mine", as the actual issue is *appropriation*, not whether or how long anything lasts across time. There *is* an enduring entity, and the issue of ignorance is in the false sense of control and ownership over that entity.

*the teaching of the noble ones. They've not seen true persons, and are neither skilled nor trained in the teaching of the true persons.*

*They regard form as self. But that regarding is just an activity (saṅkhāra). And what's the source, origin, birthplace, and inception of that activity? For an unlearned ordinary person who is struck by feelings born of ignorance-pressure, craving arises. That activity is born from that. So that activity is impermanent, conditioned, and dependently originated. And that craving, that feeling, that pressure, and that ignorance are also impermanent, conditioned, and dependently originated. That's how one should know and see in order to end the defilements with no in-between.*

*[they regard feeling, perception, activities, consciousness as self…]*

*—SN 22.81*

The same applies to the other two fetters that a *sotāpanna* has abandoned as well. It's not that one knowingly *chooses* to hold on to virtue and duty (which is the implication when *sīlabbataparāmāsa* is translated as "clinging to rites and rituals"*)*, or to be uncertain about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha (the fetter of doubt), and therefore it's not about simply doing the opposite either. It's rather that those intentions are taking place without one's knowledge, and once they are known, they can never come back, as one can't wish for one's own harm knowingly[223], especially when the result of it is a mountain of suffering (SN 56.49).

This is why it's also not only wrong but disastrous to think that a *puthujjana* can momentarily be free from ignorance and craving ("stop the chain" of *paṭiccasamuppāda)* if they just apply a meditation method or attend things like this or that, stop thinking, etc. The true nature of ignorance is such that it occurs due to having no idea that it's occurring, which means that if it is truly seen even once, it cannot come back to the same extent it was present before. Such a view thus implies not only an ignorance of what ignorance is, which is exactly what it needs to continue unhindered, but also a conviction that one is already abandoning it when one clearly isn't, doubling the magnitude of the problem.

And these fetters are not the only instances where harmful intentions go unnoticed. At any given time, there will be intentions and inclinations of passion, aversion, and distraction that the ordinary person cannot see themselves having. This is what the Simile of the Cook Sutta (SN 47.8) refers to with "not grasping the hints of the mind (*cittassa nimitta*)", and saying that without that ability, it's impossible to abandon defilements. MN 2 also states that the destruction of defilements happens only for one who understands **yoniso manasikāra**, which in this relevant case would be the ability to see the "source" of whatever one is attending in the form of the *intention* behind that attention, which is where the defilements are to be found, not in *what* one is attending.

For instance, one might be fervently contemplating the Dhamma, which is a superficially wholesome action, but not realizing that in the background, on the level of that "source" (yoni), there is presently an intention of restlessness or of aversion towards an arisen feeling, which one is resisting and hoping to get rid of through that contemplation. Alternatively, people's efforts towards practice can often be rooted in a superficial sense of inspiration that is just a way of riding the wave of a pleasant feeling, and they wouldn't realize that their practice should be directed towards questioning that peripheral intention instead of just going along with whatever the mind is pulling towards, even if it's ideas about the Dhamma. This is what SN 47.8 means with the example of the monk who is practicing *satipaṭṭhāna* diligently, ardently and resolutely, and yet is unable to achieve the results that matter, like the cook who is not able to accurately pick up on the preferences of the king (the peripheral leanings of the mind) and serve him the food that he actually wants at the right time.[224]

Those results that matter, as the Sutta also says, include the *jhānas*. That's because the five hindrances can only be overcome by the one who knows and sees them, and they are the epitome of "underlying intentions" that the undeveloped mind overlooks. That's why the person who truly can abandon the five hindrances

[223] One can intentionally harm oneself in various ways, but even that is always done with the expectation of either more pleasure or less pain on the fundamental level.

[224] All this can be summarized by saying that one cannot intend what one actually wants to intend—what you say to yourself that you're intending—meaning non-passion, non-aversion, and non-distraction. One intends the opposite instead on the peripheral level, not even seeing oneself doing so, and feeling sure of having the right motivation all along.

has next to nothing stopping them from getting the Right View, as they have already necessarily learned the principle of *yoniso* and *ayoniso manasikāra* described in MN 2. They wouldn't be able to overcome those states unless they were already able to see themselves bringing them about and proliferating them, and that happens on the level of those peripheral intentions and *ayoniso manasikāra*. No mechanical meditation method can possibly absolve one from having to know and see those obstructions on the right level first in order to transcend them, as their nature is to indiscriminately underlie whatever one does[225], even the practice of Dhamma, all the more when it's of the mechanical kind that is common today.

Lastly, it cannot be emphasized enough that it's not just a matter of knowing what beneficial and unbeneficial intentions are on the intellectual level, or of classifying everything according to some predetermined scheme. Rather, uncovering one's underlying motivations and thus defilements is a process that unfolds over the long term, and its proximate cause is the abstinence from the unskillful intentions that one is already aware of, no matter how superficial one's threshold of recognition may be initially. This is what is accomplished by the stages of Gradual Training that are the prerequisites for success in the purification of the mind from hindrances. Refraining from proliferating arisen unwholesome mental states and pressures through actions is the only thing that can eventually make those previously overlooked mental states apparent for what they are. Conversely, acting out of them is the supreme way to continue to overlook them, as that necessarily involves directing one's attention past where they are, and toward this or that object or perception instead—the primordial state of the undeveloped mind.

Once ignorance pertaining to the recognition of the defilements has been abandoned, the Four Noble Truths are not far from one's grasp, because one will then be able to discern craving where it really is. Exactly how it is the root of suffering and that which turns all of one's intentions and efforts against oneself would by that point be clear as day.

> *"Through the round of many births,*
>
> *I transmigrated without success,*
>
> *searching for the builder of the house.*
>
> *Painful is birth again and again!*
>
> *House-builder, you've been seen!*
>
> *You will not build a house again,*
>
> *for your rafters and broken*
>
> *and your ridgepole shattered.*
>
> *The mind, arrived at* ******non-activity****** *(visaṅkhāragata),*
>
> *has come to the destruction of craving."*
>
> *—Dhammapada 153-154*

## Pervading the world with friendliness

by Bhikkhu Anīgha

> *Q: "I saw a video of Ajahn Nyanamoli talking about how the common practice of 'spreading and sending' metta- is basically useless, because, if I understood correctly, if your heart is truly full of metta you don't have to spread it around, it's instead just a friendly disposition toward all beings and phenomena. He also said that the common practice of spreading metta is often used as a"coverup" and as an escape from difficult emotions- avoiding the task at hand- and that all sounds very sensible to me.*
>
> *But why do some suttas talk in this manner?*

[225] Hence, they're compared to parasitic trees that encircle and grow around other trees in SN 46.39.

*'And what is the measureless liberation of mind? It's when a bhikkhu dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with friendliness the first direction, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, he dwells having pervaded the whole world with a mind imbued with friendliness—abundant, expansive, measureless, free of enmity and aversion. He dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with compassion … He dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with contentment … He dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with equanimity the first direction, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, he dwells having pervaded the whole world with a mind imbued with equanimity—abundant, expansive, measureless, free of enmity and aversion.'* "

Firstly, it must be noted that *mettā* is not and does not involve "love". "Love" is not "*mettā*" but"*pema*", and this needs to be "abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated, and unable to arise in the future."[226]

*Sorrow springs from love (pema),*

*fear springs from love;*

*one free from love*

*has no sorrow, let alone fear.*

*—Dhammapada 213*

"Loving-kindness" would therefore also be a misleading rendering of "mettā". *Mittā* (as in *kalyāṇamittā*) means "friend", and this is where the term mettā derives from. Even if "love" is taken in a more refined sense, as some sort of "spiritual love", it would still be at odds with dispassion and constitute an obstruction to total relinquishment, while genuine mettā is one of the unconditionally favorable qualities that an Arahant, who is free from any trace of liking and affinity, has *perfected*, not *given up*.[227]

Mettā is also not something that can be volitionally produced. The "liberation of mind through friendliness" (*mettācetovimutti)* described in the Suttas is the *consequence* of the successful purification of the mind from ill will.[228] Just as abandoning the five hindrances is what naturally results in the first jhāna, so too abandoning all possibility for ill will and associated mental states leads on its own to a mind of friendliness, which can then be further refined.

*"How, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu practice the way proper to the renunciate? When any bhikkhu who was covetous has abandoned covetousness, who had a mind of ill will has abandoned ill will, who was angry has abandoned anger, who was resentful has abandoned resentment, who was contemptuous has abandoned contempt, who was insolent has abandoned insolence, who was envious has abandoned envy, who was avaricious has abandoned avarice, who was fraudulent has abandoned fraud, who was deceitful has abandoned deceit, who had harmful wishes has abandoned harmful wishes, who had wrong view has abandoned wrong view, then he practices the way proper to the renunciate, I say, because of his abandoning these stains of the renunciate, these faults of the renunciate, these dregs of the renunciate, which are grounds for rebirth in a state of deprivation and whose results are to be experienced in an unhappy destination.*

*"He sees himself purified of all these harmful, unfavorable things; he sees himself liberated from them. When he sees this, gladness is born in him. When he is glad, joy is born in him; in one who is joyous, the body becomes calm; one whose body is calm feels at ease; in one who feels at ease, the mind becomes composed.*

*"He dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with friendliness the first direction, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, he dwells having*

[226] AN 4.200. See also the essay "**There's no love in loving-kindness**".

[227] As shown by the Buddha's own example, this is not something that would be necessarily observable outwardly, as his manner in the Suttas is never less than stern, and is sometimes outright brusque. In MN 81, Ven. Ānanda, his attendant, is even surprised at seeing him smile. This does not justify all-out rudeness and harsh speech; it simply means that external displays of amiability are not the measure of mettā, and can very well originate from a place of insecurity rather than the legitimate absence of any possibility of ill will.

[228] "**Longer Discussion on Four Brahmavihāras**"

*pervaded the whole world with a mind of friendliness—abundant, expansive, measureless, free of enmity and aversion.*

*(and so on for compassion, contentment, and equanimity).*

*—MN 40*

*I have heard this, Bhante: 'Brahmā abides in friendliness'. Regarding that, the Blessed One I see with my own eyes. The Blessed One abides in friendliness."*

*"Jīvaka, any passion, any aversion, or any delusion whereby ill will might arise in him, the Tathāgata has abandoned, cut off at the roots, made like a palm-stump, done away with so that it is no longer liable to future arising. If what you said referred to that, then I allow it you."*

*[…]*

*I have heard this, Bhante: 'Brahmā abides in equanimity'. Regarding that, the Blessed One I see with my own eyes. The Blessed One abides in equanimity."*

*"Jīvaka, any passion, any aversion, or any delusion* ******whereby annoyance, discontent, or resistance******[229] *might arise in him, the Tathāgata has abandoned, cut off at the roots, made like a palm-stump, done away with so that it is no longer liable to future arising. If what you said referred to that, then I allow it you."*

*—MN 55*

What forcing and fabricating mettā or any of the other divine abidings will always entail is concealing—successfully as one may—the problem's symptoms instead of addressing its root.

The Buddha therefore instructs that one should practice mettā only *after* the mind is already not overcome by ill will. The mind first needs to be able to remain steady all by itself when encountering things that challenge it, instead of needing to use mettā or any other form of meditation as an aid to ameliorate such things.

*"Venerable sir, may the Buddha please teach me Dhamma in brief! May the Holy One teach me the Dhamma in brief! Hopefully I can understand the meaning of what the Buddha says! Hopefully I can be an heir of the Buddha's teaching!"*

*"Well then, bhikkhu, you should train like this: 'My mind will be steady and well settled internally. And harmful, unfavorable qualities that have arisen will not overtake my mind.' That's how you should train.*

*When your mind is steady and well settled internally, and harmful, unfavorable qualities that have arisen don't overtake your mind, then you should train like this: 'I will develop the liberation of mind through friendliness. I'll cultivate it, make it my vehicle and my basis, keep it up, consolidate it, and properly implement it.' That's how you should train.*

*—AN 8.63*

*"Bhikkhus, possessing five qualities, a bhikkhu is incapable of entering and dwelling in right composure. What five? Here, a bhikkhu cannot patiently endure forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and touches. Possessing these five qualities, a bhikkhu is incapable of entering and dwelling in right composure.*

*—AN 5.113*

Once this indispensable foundation of mental stability is achieved[230], you would be able to start recognizing how and to what extent ill will is actually a gratuitous layer the mind adds on top of displeasing feelings, and how this layer can eventually be peeled off through further restraint, discernment, and diligence.

[229] It is implied here that to develop the further *brahmavihāras*, it's the underlying liability to passion, aversion, and delusion that needs to be abandoned even further, so that—having already done away with ill-will and achieved *mettā* as a result—annoyance, discontent, and finally resistance are overcome, automatically giving way to compassion, contentment, and equanimity respectively.

[230] By undertaking the precepts and the restraint of unwholesome intentions. Since sensuality and ill will go hand in hand, any actions rooted in the former will inevitably make one susceptible to the latter. Any peace meditation can bring despite those actions still being performed would stem from covering up that susceptibility.

The root of hatred is never something external like what someone did to you or who they are, nor even how those things make you feel. All of that simply acts as a trigger for the already-latent tendency to aversion, and that is what one should be addressing. Feelings are not in one's ultimate control.

> "*Bhikkhus, just as heat is generated and fire is produced from the conjunction and friction of two fire-sticks, but with the separation and laying aside of the sticks the resultant heat ceases and subsides; so too, in dependence on a contact to be experienced as pleasant…a contact to be experienced as unpleasant…a contact to be experienced as neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling arises…. With the cessation of that contact to be experienced as neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, the corresponding feeling … ceases and subsides.*
>
> —*SN 12.62*
>
> "*Bhikkhus, feeling is nonself. For if, bhikkhus, feeling were self, feeling would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of feeling: 'Let my feeling be thus; let my feeling not be thus.' But because feeling is nonself, feeling leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of feeling: 'Let my feeling be thus; let my feeling not be thus.'*
>
> —*SN 22.59*

So instead of trying to scramble for ways to suppress the disagreeability caused by people or events and replace it with the opposite[231], which may not work at all if the circumstance is particularly challenging, what you need to do is cease to provide the fuel[232] for ill will—the *aversion* towards the disagreeability—to remain and further increase, and leave the disagreeability itself alone. This is how you would slowly but surely wear away the core of the problem and any future liability to it.

> "*And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen ill will and for the increase and expansion of arisen ill will? There is, bhikkhus*******, the sign of opposition******* (paṭighanimitta): frequently attending to it not through the origin (ayoniso manasikāra) is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen ill will and for the increase and expansion of arisen ill will.*
>
> —*SN 46.51*[233]

Since both ill will and the internal basis for it are there simultaneously, they are indistinguishable for the ignorant mind that is used to turning pressure into unwholesome states and cannot conceive how to stay calm *despite* that which tries to provoke it. The natural and effortless course of action is then to try to eliminate the provocation, just now inwardly instead of by lashing out at external entities as it used to. Hence, suppression and management of challenging emotions is precisely the approach that most people will find congenial and "helpful"—it stems from the same tendency to shun unpleasant feelings, and the Middle Way remains untrodden.

A person who deals with their ill will like this is the same as someone who can only tolerate vegetables when they're smeared with a thick dressing that masks their actual taste. To put it bluntly, it's a form of cheating.

In the ultimate sense, the mind can only really be averse towards itself[234]: you can't truly hate somebody else directly; you can only hate (or love, for that matter) *how they make you feel*. Consequently, managing your feelings is at best quantitatively and not qualitatively different from crudely hateful behaviors aimed at other people.

Proper abandonment of ill will requires you to endure discomfort internally[235], and does not provide the immediate, easy escape from it that most people expect. It forces you to withstand the tug of your own

[231] By trying to convince yourself that the other is ultimately a good person, that they harmed you unintentionally, that they will one day change their ways, by repeating to yourself that you forgive them, etc. All of this simply continues to project the problem externally, ironically making you still liable to ill will. The practice is not about simply "reconditioning" the way you feel about this or that person or object, in which case the Dhamma would be little more than psychotherapy. The Dhamma is about uprooting the underlying tendencies to passion, aversion, and ignorance in regard to what you feel.

[232] That "fuel" is always in the form of *actions*, including mental ones such as relishing the thought of retaliating against someone, or in general of doing things to relieve the displeasure.

[233] i.e., the *paṭighanimitta* is *not* ill will in and of itself.

[234] "**Mind Self-Inflicting**"

[235] Which, of course, is not the same as tolerating unwholesome thoughts.

mind attempting to sprint in the direction that it's been habituated to. But by sticking to that patiently, you would over time begin to see for yourself that none of the disagreeability and dissonance that was felt when someone insulted you, attacked you, annoyed you, or was simply not pleasant to be with, and which you would've instinctively covered up by trying to "antidote" it with loving-kindness, was in any way the problem. It was an entirely separate movement in the direction of ill will, of *leaning away* from displeasure, that was responsible for all the suffering, and that would've been subdued in the right way such that it simply cannot return even if you wanted it to, much less if circumstances merely get out of hand.

> "*And how, bhikkhus, is there restraint? Here, having seen a form with the eye, a bhikkhu is not intent upon a pleasing form and not repelled by a displeasing form. He dwells having set up recollection of the body*******, with a measureless mind,******** and he understands as it is that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, wherein those harmful unwholesome states cease without remainder. Having heard a sound with the ear … Having cognized a mental phenomenon with the mind, he is not intent upon a pleasing mental phenomenon and not repelled by a displeasing mental phenomenon. He dwells having set up recollection of the body, with a measureless mind, and he understands as it is that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, wherein those harmful unwholesome states cease without remainder. It is in such a way that there is restraint.*
>
> "*Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would catch six animals—with different domains and different feeding grounds—and tie them by a strong rope. He would catch a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey, and tie each by a strong rope. Having done so, he would bind them to a strong post or pillar. Then those six animals with different domains and different feeding grounds would each pull in the direction of its own feeding ground and domain. The snake would pull one way, thinking, 'Let me enter an anthill' … as above … The monkey would pull another way, thinking, 'Let me enter a forest.'*
>
> "*Now when these six animals become worn out and fatigued, they would stand close to that post or pillar, they would sit down there, they would lie down there. So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has developed and cultivated recollection related to the body, the eye does not pull in the direction of agreeable forms nor are disagreeable forms aversive; the ear does not pull in the direction of agreeable sounds nor are disagreeable sounds aversive; the nose does not pull in the direction of agreeable odours nor are disagreeable odours aversive; the tongue does not pull in the direction of agreeable tastes nor are disagreeable tastes aversive; the body does not pull in the direction of agreeable touches nor are disagreeable touches aversive; the mind does not pull in the direction of agreeable phenomena nor are disagreeable phenomena aversive.*
>
> —*SN 35.247*

"Boundlessness" can only be achieved if you learn how to not get bound by things that try to bind you. Otherwise, you will be bound by the task of controlling circumstances, which includes the very way your aggregates are shaped by events.

> "*This is called, friends, a bhikkhu who is uncorrupted amidst forms cognizable by the eye, uncorrupted amidst sounds cognizable by the ear, uncorrupted amidst odours cognizable by the nose, uncorrupted amidst tastes cognizable by the tongue, uncorrupted amidst touches cognizable by the body, uncorrupted amidst phenomena cognizable by the mind. When a bhikkhu dwells thus, if Mara approaches him through the eye, Mara fails to gain access to him, Mara fails to get a hold on him. If Mara approaches him through the ear … through the mind, Mara fails to gain access to him, Mara fails to get a hold on him.*
>
> "*Suppose, friends, there is a peaked house or a hall built of thickly packed clay and freshly plastered. If a man approaches it from the east with a blazing grass torch, or from the west, from the north, from the south, from below, or from above, whichever way he approaches it the fire fails to gain access to it, the fire fails to get a hold on it. So too, friends, when a bhikkhu dwells thus, if Mara approaches him through the eye … through the mind, Mara fails to gain access to him, Mara fails to get a hold on him.*
>
> "*When a bhikkhu dwells thus, he overwhelms forms; forms do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms sounds; sounds do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms odours; odours do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms tastes; tastes do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms touches; touches do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms phenomena; phenomena do not overwhelm him. This is called, friends, a bhikkhu who overwhelms forms, who overwhelms sounds, who overwhelms odours, who overwhelms tastes, who over-*

*whelms touches, who overwhelms phenomena—one who overwhelms and who is not overwhelmed. He has overwhelmed those harmful unwholesome states that defile, that lead to renewed existence, that bring trouble, that result in suffering, and that lead to future birth, aging, and death.*

*"It is in this way, friends, that one is uncorrupted."*

*—SN 35.243*[236]

Having established all this, it becomes clearer what the expression "pervading the whole world with friendliness" in the Suttas is pointing at, and that it's not the saccharine "radiating beams of loving-kindness" towards individuals that is typically practiced. Mettā and the brahmavihāras in general are not "skillful fabrications" as they would often be portrayed when people on some level realize that the states they're cultivating are indeed artificial. That sort of effort is rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of what the defilements are.

*"Limpid, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is blemished by adventitious defilements. The untrained worldling does not understand this as it is; therefore I say that for the uninstructed worldling there is no development of the mind."*

*"Limpid, bhikkhus, is this mind, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. The trained noble disciple understands this as it is; therefore I say that for the instructed noble disciple there is development of the mind."*

*—AN 1.51-52*[237]

Since mettā is in reality the primordial attitude of the mind, it would of its own accord become established in a universal, unbiased manner as soon you manage to properly remove from every nook and cranny of your experience the adventitious aversion to displeasure that was obstructing that more fundamental, wider, and unadulterated context. Having not finished, or perhaps not even started that work of *clearing out* and *undoing* the ill will you're responsible for, as opposed to an insufficient *accumulation* and *fabrication* of kindness and benevolence, is the sole reason why the mind is not already established in mettā—effortlessly.

By steadying and frequently abiding in this frame of mind, which you would have simply *uncovered* and not manufactured through wishing and appropriated intention, any possibility for the mind to value sensuality and the world would also have to disappear, and the permanent destruction of all appropriation could eventually come about. That is why the *brahmavihāras* were taught by the Buddha as perfectly viable vehicles to Arahantship.

## Restraining the Senses

by *Bhikkhu Anīgha*

*At Sāvatthī.*

*"Bhikkhus, these six contact-fields bring suffering when they're untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained. What six?*

*The contact-field of the eye brings suffering when it's untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained. The contact-field of the ear … nose … tongue … body …*

*The contact-field of the mental faculty brings suffering when it's untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained.*

*These six contact-fields bring suffering when they're untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained.*

*These six contact-fields bring happiness when they're well tamed, well guarded, well protected, and well restrained. What six?*

[236] See also MN 21.
[237] "*Undefiled by the Defilements*"

*The contact-field of the eye brings happiness when it's well tamed, well guarded, well protected, and well restrained. The contact-field of the ear … nose… tongue … body …*

*The contact-field of the mental faculty brings happiness when it's well tamed, well guarded, well protected, and well restrained.*

*These six contact-fields bring happiness when they're well tamed, well guarded, well protected, and well restrained."*

*That is what the Buddha said. Then the Holy One, the Teacher, went on to say:*

*"Bhikkhus, it's just these six contact-fields*

*Where one unrestrained meets with suffering.*

*Those who* ******understand******* how to restrain them*

*live with confidence, not assailed.*

*When you see pleasant sights*

*and unpleasant ones, too,*

*subdue all manner of desire for the pleasant,*

*and don't pollute the mind with thoughts of antipathy.*

*When you hear sounds both agreeable and disagreeable,*

*don't become enthralled with agreeable sounds,*

*and subdue aversion for the disagreeable.*

*Don't pollute the mind with thoughts of antipathy.*

*When you smell a fragrant, delightful scent,*

*and one that's foul and unpleasant,*

*subdue resistance against the unpleasant,*

*and don't yield to desire for the pleasant.*

*When partaking of a sweet, delicious taste,*

*and sometimes those that are bitter,*

*don't partake of the sweet taste fixated on it,*

*and don't despise the bitter.*

*Don't get infatuated with a pleasant pressure*

*and don't tremble at an unpleasant one.*

*Look with equanimity at the duality*

*of pleasant and painful pressures,*

*without favoring or opposing anything.*

*People generally let their perceptions proliferate;*

*perceiving and proliferating, they become engaged.*

*Expel all thoughts concerned with the mundane,*

*And go about intent on renunciation.*

*When the mind is well developed like this*

*In regard to the six,*

*it doesn't waver at all in face of pressure.*

*Bhikkhus, conquer these passions and aversions*

*And go beyond birth and death!"*

*—SN 35.94*

The development of sense restraint hinges on the discernment of what non-restraint is. "Guarding the sense doors", as it's called in the Suttas, is often inadvertently confused with "sensory deprivation" and blind denial, a mode of practice that is as misguided as careless indulgence.[238] [239]

*[Already] contacted, bhikkhus, one feels,* ******intends*******, and perceives.*

*—SN 35.93*[240]

The arisen consciousness of a sense object[241], vague as it may be, is itself what allows you to do anything in regard to it, including restraint. Therefore, sense restraint (*indriyasaṃvara,* lit. "holding back" of the faculties) is about preventing the senses from *going further "into"* the pressuring things that arise of their own accord. This is to be done knowing in advance that the potential increase in engagement and attention will materialize states of passion and aversion that are for now still distant.

The choice to become more involved with a sense experience than you already are is what is referred to in the typical formula found in the Suttas as "grasping at signs and features" (*nimittaggāhī anubyañjanaggāhī).* The signs and features of a thing are not just the particular sensory perceptions of it (shape, color, texture, etc.), but also the entire "world" of significances, feelings, memories, associations, ideas, and intentions associated with it, which proliferates the more you give that thing your attention.

This act of grasping at signs and features can be illustrated by an analogy: when presented with the thumbnail, title, and author of an online video, you already have a rough idea of what it's about and what effect it could have on you, but you haven't clicked on it yet. If you do click and start engaging with its content, the range of its significances (*nimitta/anubyañjana),* which was initially limited to only what was revealed by the thumbnail, will start to widen, and with that your emotional involvement with it.

Similarly, when an object provocative of lust or aversion is presented to any of your six senses, you have a choice to let yourself "descend" into it more—by trying to access it with *other* senses that are not yet in contact with it, by intensifying the experience of a given sense, etc.—or not.[242]

[238] See also "Unwelcoming of the Hindrances", and "Sense Restraint is Not Just For Monks".

[239] And is typically implemented during so called "meditation retreats".

[240] It could be said that you have more control over other people's senses than your own (hence the six senses are compared to an empty village liable to attack by bandits in SN 35.238). You can introduce things into someone else's senses that they were entirely unconscious of, but when it comes to yourself, all you can achieve through your own will is to experience something *to a greater degree* (i.e., it must have already been known or "contacted" to some extent at least in mind). The "real" five-sense confirmation of an imaginary experience is simply an increase in intensity of the same thing; it's not a new thing altogether. Therefore, the opposite also applies: you cannot get yourself to totally not experience something volitionally, as the very attempt to do away with it requires you to be aware of *it* at least in imagination. At most, you can intentionally decrease the intensity of things you're currently conscious of by not placing them at the center of your attention. You don't have a final say in exactly when a phenomenon will completely disappear from your overall experience (including the sixth sense) without any residue—and fortunately, it doesn't matter when it does. You would already have a purified mind if there is no delight or resistance throughout its undetermined duration.

[241] Including a mental knowledge that you *may* come across it existing prior to the physical encounter. It's important to understand that the mental faculty is as valid and real as the other five. The experience of a phenomenon does not begin an end with its presence to the five senses.

[242] And the choice to "click" begins with the mind, and is therefore always intentional. You cannot accidentally end up absorbed in the pleasant characteristics of a sight, sound, etc. Similarly, you can cover your eyes each time an enticing sight comes up, but continue to be involved with it on a mental level if you don't discern your intentions clearly enough. "Involvement" includes either delighting in the prospect of it, or anxiously trying to "counter" it and abolish the feeling it evokes: expanding the analogy, the latter would be like clicking on the thumbnails that attract you just to leave a dislike and a negative comment, and on those that repel you just to do the opposite. If you do that, *you are still clicking,* and that is the mistake.

The difference between this and "sense deprivation" is that this requires discernment and cannot be done mindlessly or methodically, and it's not about restraining *everything*.[243]

> *"Whatever you've shielded the mind from*
>
> *can't cause you suffering.*
>
> *So, you should shield the mind from everything,*
>
> *then you're freed from all suffering."*
>
> *(The Buddha's reply):*
>
> *"You needn't shield the mind from everything—*
>
> *Not the mind that is under control.*
>
> *You need only shield the mind*
>
> *from where the bad things come."*
>
> *—SN 1.24*

Unlike an overzealous total avoidance, perfect sense restraint would not cripple your ability to function externally. All it asks of you is that your actions first and foremost do not transgress the boundaries of the eight precepts, and then that the intention behind whatever you do is not infected with sensual desire, covetousness, ill will, or distraction. The right restraint cannot be "overdone", and the more it is understood, the more natural and effortless it becomes.

It also requires acknowledging the extent of your responsibility and clarifying it further until it becomes perfectly evident—that's it's in *wilfully clicking*, and not in whether thumbnails are presented to you and how appealing they are[244] —as well as the ability to assess your present mental state, without which it's impossible to accurately determine what needs to be restrained, how, and, most importantly, *why*.

Additionally, the attempt to guard the sense doors correctly needs to come with a willingness to put up with a degree of internal discomfort, since that's what will be there if you restrain *yourself* properly instead of trying to push back the world and circumstances. [245]

But when that displeasure is understood, and it is recognized that it stems not from the absence of the desirable "food" for the senses, but from the mind's active resistance to that absence, which is then relinquished, then mere restraint becomes the foundation for the right type of joy. The one that is fully based on renunciation and is devoid of defiling inclinations:

> *"Bhikkhus, I will teach you who lives negligently and who lives diligently. Listen …*
>
> *And how does one live negligently?*
>
> *When one lives with the eye faculty unrestrained, the mind becomes "soaked" in sights cognizable by the eye. When the mind is thus polluted, there's no gladness. When there's no gladness, there's no joy. When there's no joy, there's no calm. When there's no calm, there's unease. When one is uneasy, the mind does not become composed. When the mind is not composed, phenomena are not clear. Since phenomena are not clear, one is considered to live negligently.*

[243] Which is technically impossible, and the attempt to do so is in itself actually a lack of restraint: an intention rooted in aversion. See "You Don't Need to Say 'No' to Everything" and "Sensuality VS Agreeability".

[244] Naturally, a lack of sense restraint will bring you to a state of mind where you will be tempted even more—you get a greater number of suggestions for content similar to what you've been "clicking" on recently. But even then, you can't undo the proliferation and wipe the slate clean by choice; you can only work from where you currently are: accept that the new temptations that resulted from carelessness will be lurking around in your mind, and now restrain yourself in regard to *that.* Eventually, the pressure would have to diminish through lack of further fuel.

[245] It is necessary to tailor your environment so you're not too frequently exposed to things that would easily overwhelm you. But never to the point where you place the all the burden of restraint and maintaining internal purity on the outer environment and setup and not your own intentions.

*When one lives with the ear … nose … tongue … body … mental faculty unrestrained, your mind becomes "soaked" in phenomena cognizable by the mental faculty. When the mind is thus polluted, there's no gladness. When there's no gladness, there's no joy. When there's no joy, there's no calm. When there's no calm, there's unease. When one is uneasy, the mind does not become composed. When the mind is not composed, phenomena are not clear. Since phenomena are not clear, one is considered to live negligently.*

*That's how one lives negligently.*

*And how does one live diligently?*

*When one lives with the eye faculty restrained, the mind doesn't become "soaked" in sights cognizable by the eye. When the mind isn't thus polluted, gladness is born. When glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyous, the body becomes calm. When the body is calm, one is at ease. And when one is at ease, the mind becomes composed. When the mind is composed, phenomena are clear. Because phenomena are clear one is considered to live diligently.*

*When one lives with the ear … nose … tongue … body … mental faculty restrained, the mind doesn't become "soaked" in phenomena cognizable by the mental faculty. When the mind isn't thus polluted, gladness is born. When glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyous, the body becomes calm. When the body is calm, one is at ease. And when one is at ease, the mind becomes composed. When the mind is composed, phenomena are clear. Because phenomena are clear one is considered to live diligently.*

*That's how one lives diligently."*

*—SN 35.97*

"*Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has three qualities, he lives* ******full of joy and happiness in the present life*******, and he has laid the groundwork for exhausting the defilements. What three?*

*He guards the sense doors, eats in moderation, and is committed to wakefulness.*

*And how does a bhikkhu guard the sense doors?*

*"When seeing a sight with the eye, he doesn't grasp at signs and features of it on account of which—due to abiding with the eye faculty unrestrained—bad, detrimental phenomena of longing and upset would flow in on him. He practices to restrain that; he guards the eye faculty and brings about the restraint of the eye faculty.*

*When hearing a sound with the ear …*

*When smelling an odor with the nose …*

*When tasting a flavor with the tongue …*

*When touching a touch with the body …*

*When cognizing a phenomenon with the mental faculty, he doesn't grasp at signs and features of it on account of which—due to abiding with the mental faculty unrestrained—bad, detrimental phenomena of longing and upset would flow in on him. He practices to restrain that; he guards the mental faculty and brings about the restraint of the mental faculty."*

*Suppose a chariot stood harnessed to thoroughbreds at a level crossroads, with a goad ready. Then a deft horse trainer, a master charioteer, might mount the chariot, taking the reins in his right hand and goad in the left.* ******He'd drive out and back wherever he wishes, whenever he wishes.******

*In the same way, a bhikkhu trains to protect, control, tame, and pacify these six senses.*

*—SN 35.239*

No circumstance or accident can force you to give your attention to something out of lust or ill will, hence the above simile of the master charioteer who is in full control.[246]

[246]Even when the senses have to engage with things out of practical necessity that *could* arouse defilements (which, to be sure, does not extend to anything against the precepts), it's perfectly possible to remain mindful of the intention to fulfill that task and nothing

The way to prevent the mind from going down the rabbit hole of provoking sense objects is to keep it anchored to a broader context or theme than the particularity and variability of those objects[247]. That is why lack of sense restraint is said to be a consequence of insufficient recollection and awareness *(satisampajaññā)*.[248]

> *"And how, bhikkhus, is there restraint? When a bhikkhu sees a sight with the eye, if it's agreeable he doesn't harbor passion for it, if it's disagreeable he's not averse to it. He lives with recollection of the body established and with an immeasurable mind. And he understands as it is the liberation by mind and liberation by understanding where those bad, detrimental qualities cease without remainder. When he hears a sound with the ear …When he cognizes a phenomenon with the mental faculty, if it's agreeable he doesn't harbor passion for it, if it's disagreeable he's not averse to it. He lives with recollection of the body established and with an immeasurable mind. And he understands as it is the liberation by mind and liberation by understanding where those bad, detrimental qualities cease without remainder. It is in such a way that there is restraint.*
>
> *"Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would catch six animals—with different domains and different feeding grounds—and tie them by a strong rope. He would catch a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey, and tie each by a strong rope. Having done so, he would bind them to a strong post or pillar. Then those six animals with different domains and different feeding grounds would each pull in the direction of its own feeding ground and domain. The snake would pull one way, thinking, 'Let me enter an anthill' … as above … The monkey would pull another way, thinking, 'Let me enter a forest.'*
>
> *"Now when these six animals become worn out and fatigued, they would stand close to that post or pillar, they would sit down there, they would lie down there. So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has developed and cultivated recollection of the body, the eye does not pull in the direction of agreeable sights nor are disagreeable forms disturbing; the ear does not pull in the direction of agreeable sounds nor are disagreeable sounds disturbing; the nose does not pull in the direction of agreeable odors nor are disagreeable odors disturbing; the tongue does not pull in the direction of agreeable tastes nor are disagreeable tastes disturbing; the body does not pull in the direction of agreeable tactile objects nor are disagreeable tactile objects disturbing; the mind does not pull in the direction of agreeable mental phenomena nor are disagreeable mental phenomena disturbing.*
>
> *"It is in such a way that there is restraint.*
>
> *—SN 35.247*[249]

A common mistake that impedes properly targeted restraint is to confuse *preferences*, or "likes and dislikes", with *desires.* But preferences are a matter of each sense "animal" having its own feeding ground, and within that, happening to find some things agreeable and some things less so. This is due to various factors related to your history, environment, and inclinations that have been accumulated through repeated past choices, and is not the issue per se. The real concern is whether the animals are *pulling you* towards what they like and away from what they dislike (and even more importantly, whether you yield). It's paramount to keep that distinction in perspective, since only then will you be able to rightly "tie them to the post" instead of being caught in the two extremes of running along with them and beating them up.

Both of these attitudes can be very subtle and will generally go unnoticed, since one starts out being unclear about the true intention simultaneously underlying one's actions, including the efforts to practice. There is a reason why, in the progression of the Gradual Training[250], one is instructed to take on sense restraint only

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more, thereby never becoming preoccupied with the alluring details of the respective objects even as they are present. This is how you would prevent the unavoidable act of eating, the best example of this, from becoming tainted with delight in the agreeability of the food ("Simile of the Son's Flesh").

[247] For another example of this, see "Appointment With Death". The same principle of **yoniso manasikāra** applies to all the various ways of establishing **sati**. A particularly relevant one in the context of restraint is the recollection of the danger in sensuality.

[248] AN 10.61. Trying to immerse yourself in things like bodily sensations and positive mental images or mantras, which is the opposite of *satisampajaññā,* would be choosing non-restraint on one domain so as to restrain another. The right themes of *sati* are wholesome precisely because they can never be "grasped at" in the same way that sense objects can. They don't *capture* your attention, but rather *contextualize* it.

[249] "The Six-Sensed Animal"

[250] Found in MN 107, MN 39, among others.

once the first step of virtue and "seeing the danger in the slightest fault" is well established (which means unwavering observance of the eight precepts at minimum, not only in the letter but in spirit too[251]).

If you have not—as a prerequisite, not even as a guarantee—indefinitely abandoned the possibility to break these precepts in the future and any openness to acting unskilfully by body and speech[252], you *will* be grasping at the signs and features of things that induce unwholesome states on some level, whether you realize it or not. Your intentions for the future, as in the actions that you are at least *open* to doing at some undefined point later on, influence every moment of your present, no matter if you're not planning or dwelling on them at all.

> *"Bhikkhus, suppose a sheaf of barley was placed at a crossroads. Then six men would come along carrying flails, and started threshing the sheaf of barley. So that sheaf of barley would be thoroughly threshed by those six flails. Then a seventh man would come along carrying a flail, and he'd give the sheaf of barley a seventh threshing. So that sheaf of barley would be even more thoroughly threshed by that seventh flail.*
>
> *In the same way, an unlearned ordinary person is threshed in the eye by both pleasant and unpleasant sights. They're threshed in the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind by both pleasant and unpleasant phenomena. And if that unlearned ordinary person has intentions for being [bhava] again in the future, that inept man is even more thoroughly threshed, like that sheaf of barley threshed by the seventh man.*
>
> *—SN 35.248*

## Unyoked from Biology

*by Bhikkhu Anīgha*

There is no conflict between the scientific understanding of humans as primates subject to inborn biological forces, and the Buddha's seemingly radical proposition that it is possible to have a mind that is entirely devoid of craving, provided both sides of the picture are put in their right place.

How we experience life's various situations is determined by our body, whose nature is fundamentally physiochemical. Things like the ingestion of substances, our age, and the concentration of one hormone or the other in our body can profoundly affect how we feel in relation to an event. And those feelings in turn do have physiological manifestations like pupil dilation, changes in breathing patterns, and so on.

But when the Suttas speak of the destruction of craving, they do not refer to the disappearance or alteration of bodily phenomena such as these. Craving is a tendency that exists *in relation* to how we feel[253], and its sole cause is *ignorance (avijjā)*: something we're certainly responsible for (AN 10.61) and cannot somehow be etched into our bodies, whose propensities we have no ultimate say in. And it is because of this that freedom from craving, and hence any traces of suffering, is perfectly attainable even though we can never completely override our biological conditioning.

There are two extremes: the assumption that we are justified or even required to yield to our natural urges so as to avoid suffering, and the assumption that feelings are the root of the unwholesome (which need not at all be explicit). The former inclines some to doubt the possibility of the ending of craving, and the latter leads the rest to go astray in their efforts to achieve it, even if they're certain of following the Buddhist path. The Buddha's ground-breaking insight centers on the transcendence of these two extremes, not by balancing them out or taking parts of each, but by completely eradicating any traces of both indulgence and denial in the broadest sense, since both are equally the result of ignorance and a mistaken sense of entitlement over experience.

[251] With potential wiggle room when it comes to the sixth precept. See "Accomplished in Virtue".

[252] Keeping one's speech in check, not only bodily activities, is crucial, and the need for it is often overlooked. Uncontrolled speech intrinsically keeps the mind tied to concerns in regard to the agreeable and disagreeable.

[253] Feeling: known as *vedanā* in the Suttas, which should be understood as the affective quality of an experience—pleasant, unpleasant, or neither—and not as "sensations", which are simply objects of the faculty of touch in the same way as tastes correspond to the tongue. In the context of this essay, *vedanā* is to be taken as a bodily phenomenon. In other words, we are to regard what some may call "subjective" feelings, like the displeasure or sadness connected with the loss of something valuable, as pertaining to the body, even when there is no blatantly physical manifestation of them.

*"Friend, how did you cross the flood?"*

*"Neither standing nor swimming, friend, I crossed the flood."*

*"But how did you cross the flood neither standing nor swimming?"*

*"When I stood still, I sank. And when I swam, I was swept away. That's how I crossed the flood neither standing nor swimming."*

*"After a long time I see*

*a brahmin extinguished.*

*Neither standing nor swimming,*

*he's crossed over attachment to the world."*

*—SN 1.1*

The drives ingrained in our physiology can only *suggest*, strongly as they may, certain actions in certain situations. The smell and sight of food will arouse a pull towards eating it when we're hungry or when our tongue happens to particularly enjoy the taste of what's on offer, or a combination of both. Insults and physical abuse directed at us will produce a sense of displeasure and nuisance that *wants us* to retaliate. The mere presence of these inclinations does not present an issue or involve craving in and of itself, just as a baited hook does not pose a problem for a fish until it bites it.

Recognizing that there is no causal link between our physiological drives and our choices, attitudes, and assumptions infected with craving is how the Middle Way can become intelligible, at least theoretically. No magnitude of these drives, solely on their own, can transform into actions rooted in passion and aversion, and it is owing to this inescapable responsibility for our actions that full destruction of the influxes is achievable[254] while still possessing the very same human body and senses with their individual dispositions.[255]

*He understands: "Birth is destroyed, the renunciate life has been lived, what has to be done has been done, there will be no more of this". And he understands: "No disturbances dependent on the influxes of sensuality, being, and ignorance are found here; there is only this amount of disturbance—namely, that dependent on this six-sensed body, conditioned by life."*

*—MN 121*

Nibbāna can be described as the state where no matter how forcefully and intimately the urges bound with one's form try to assert themselves and whether they are meritorious or demeritorious, the mind's[256] felt need to *act* in accordance with them—a need that can be categorized as passion, aversion, or carelessness/distraction depending on the type of feeling or pressure—is completely extinguished, through nothing other than right understanding and disenchantment. [257]

******"I am not afraid of fear,******

*Our Teacher is skilled in the Deathless.*

*Where fear cannot land—*

[254]On the other hand, it is also because of it that we are bound in the first place. If our actions were the direct result of our natural drives, if we weren't fundamentally always free to say either "yes" or "no" to whatever our bodies push us towards, there would be no room for suffering to manifest. Suffering necessitates freedom of choice. In the same vein, denying our responsibility and pretending that our actions "just happen" in direct response to external stimuli just as leaves are blown by the wind ameliorates our suffering, but for the wrong reason. This is why, as the Suttas say, the path can only ever begin with the acceptance of what's sometimes called "mundane right view": that there is action, and that we're responsible for it.

[255]This is how different Arahants in the Suttas would exhibit different traits and proclivities, despite all of them being equally free from the sense of self and conceit.

[256]The "mind" discussed throughout this writing is what's referred to in Pāli as *citta.*

[257]And hence they cannot rightly be called urges anymore, even though their "shape" and significance remain unchanged. Any designations used here could be misconstrued as implying the presence of craving when that's not what is meant. As explained in SN 35.70, this very principle is the essence of the Dhamma, but it can only be experienced by the wise for themselves. It cannot be accurately understood in theory, which is not to say that it is mystical, found in some hidden reality, or is "inexpressible in words".

*That's the path the bhikkhus walk by."*

*—Theragātha 21*

Therefore, Nibbāna is defined in the Suttas as simply the destruction of these three tendencies without any residue.

*"Māgaṇḍiya, the eye likes sights, it delights in them and enjoys them. That's been tamed, guarded, protected, and restrained by the Realized One, and he teaches the Dhamma for its restraint…*

*"The ear likes sounds … The nose likes smells … The tongue likes tastes … The body likes touches … The mental faculty (mano) likes mental phenomena, it delights in them and enjoys them. That's been tamed, guarded, protected, and restrained by the Realized One, and he teaches the Dhamma for its restraint."*

*…*

*"What do you think, Māgaṇḍiya? Take someone who used to amuse themselves with sights cognizable by the eye (sounds cognizable by the ear … touches cognizable by the body) that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. Sometime later—having understood as it is the origin, ending, gratification, woe, and escape regarding sights (sounds … touches), and having given up craving and dispelled passion for them—they would live rid of thirst, their mind (citta)* ******internally******[258] *at peace. What would you have to say to them, Māgaṇḍiya?"*

*"Nothing, Master Gotama."*

*—MN 75*

*'Sensuality should be known. And its foundation, diversity, result, cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation should be known.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? There are these five strands of sensuality. Sights cognizable by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. Sounds cognizable by the ear … Smells cognizable by the nose … Tastes cognizable by the tongue … Touches cognizable by the body that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing.* ******However, these are not sensuality.******* In the training of the Noble One they're called 'strands of sensuality'.*

******Passionate intention******* is a man's sensuality;*

*The attractive things in the world aren't sensuality.*

*Passionate intention is a man's sensuality.*

*The attractive things remain in the world, just as they are,*

*But the wise dispel desire for them.*

*—AN 6.63*[259]

This doesn't mean that an Arahant would never submit to the pulls of their body, but that only the neutral ones[260] would potentially be acted upon depending on the situation; all other pressures, *although arisen*, can do nothing but loiter around in vain.

*"Bhikkhus, an unlearned ordinary person speaks of the ocean. But that's not the ocean in the training of the Noble One. That's just a large body of water, a large sea of water. The eye is the ocean for a man, and its tide is made of sights.*

[258] Cp. footnote 23 below.

[259] It is our individual biological and chemical makeup that determines which things are attractive to us and to what extent. So, "the attractive things remain just as they are" is another way of saying "biology remains unchanged". As stated by the Buddha later in this same discourse, it is intention (*cetanā)* that he calls action (*kamma*). The practice should thus be aimed at addressing the things that we *do* when we feel these biological pulls, not only bodily and verbally, but also through the more refined pathways of mental volition.

[260] Things not found amidst the actions an Arahant is incapable of (AN 9.7).

******One who withstands that tide******* is said to have crossed over the ocean of the eye, with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and monsters. Crossed over, the brahmin stands on firm ground.*

*The ear … nose … tongue … body … the mental faculty (mano) is an ocean for a man, and its tide is made of mental phenomena. One who withstands that tide is said to have crossed over the ocean of the mental faculty, with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and monsters. Crossed over, the brahmin stands on firm ground."*

*—SN 35.228*

*"Any bhikkhu or bhikkhuni who has not given up passion, aversion, and muddledness is said to have not crossed over the ocean with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and monsters. Any bhikkhu or bhikkhuni who has given up passion, aversion, and muddledness is said to have crossed over the ocean with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and monsters. Crossed over and gone beyond, the brahmin stands on firm ground.*

*—Itivuttaka 69*

Nibbāna is also known as the "Undetermined", "Unborn", "Unmade", etc., and this should not be interpreted with any esoteric or mystical connotations. These epithets are meant to convey how it's the only attitude, brought about through wisdom and not happenstance or luck, that is completely not determined and not propelled by any of the drives, coarse or refined, that are linked with our bodies.[261]

Another significant distinction to make is that the *citta*, that which ought to be cleared of defilements, is not synonymous with our brain. The *citta,* if we insist on outlining a relationship between the two, is that which has intentions, views, and attitudes towards what occurs in the brain, i.e., everything (for practical purposes). This includes any concepts, ideas, and mental images, which are the realm of *mano,* as opposed to *citta.*[262]

The mind is by definition a negative phenomenon, in that it lacks a positive or concrete substance by which it can be pinpointed, unlike a chair in a room.[263] [264] For this same reason, the purification of the mind does not necessarily induce any tangible alteration in the manner in which experiences—the positive or actual aspect—manifest. Suffering, just like the mind, is also a negative phenomenon; contrary to our deeply ingrained assumptions, suffering is not the presence of unpleasant feelings and moods, which are in themselves bodily (and positive). Suffering can exist only to the extent to which there is an undefined compulsion to *act in some way* to alter those feelings, superimposed on them without ever actually mixing with them.[265] If that ambiguous compulsion to escape the inescapable is abandoned through understanding, then any unpleasant emotions originating from the brain, regardless of their intensity, will cease to be accompanied by even the smallest amount of anguish: the "second arrow" disappears.[266]

Embracing the view that the mind is the brain or is contained within it, as is not uncommon in modern thought, necessitates rejecting the possibility of individual choice for the sake of logical consistency, closing

[261] Bearing in mind that in this context "body" includes the sixth sense base or mental faculty. We are here not concerned with existence in other realms, although the same principle applies. Broadly put, the body (*kāya,* lit. "heap"), physical/biological or otherwise, is that which is "there", arisen independent of one's wishes, pressured by which one feels the pleasures and pains that propel one to make good or bad choices.

[262] In some contexts the two are used synonymously in the Suttas. But in the present context, which is the same as in AN 6.55 quoted below and others like SN 35.246, they are not the same.

[263] And this is why the *citta,* despite this special status, cannot rightly be considered a "soul", a "self", or "mine". In order to be so, it would need to be able to stand on its own feet and not be liable to change, but its very defining trait is that of "being-in-relation-to" other phenomena that are inherently impermanent and bound for destruction, after which there could not be a *citta* in relation to them.

[264] Note also that the ability to recognize what the *citta* is in one's experience is already an outstanding achievement (the stepping stone to stream-entry, see footnote 16), precisely because of its lack of positive characteristics by which it can be pinned down in the way that specific objects can (including thoughts and ideas). This is why the Suttas speak of "picking up the **hint** or **sign (nimitta)"** of the mind, and not of directly "seeing" the mind as a tangible object. This certainly doesn't mean that the mind is "outside" of the five aggregates, which is an impossibility.

[265] This vague (yet most definitely real and often agonizing) impulse to somehow fight back when touched by the six-sense body's pressures is what craving is. This is why it's said to "delight now here and now there" (*tatratatrābhinandinī*); it is by nature never fixed or specific.

[266] The idea that there can be actual *feelings* without any trace of craving or suffering is likely to sound paradoxical, and it should.

off the prospect of the deliberate effort required to develop one's mind. [267]

But because these two things are not the same, Nibbāna is not only possible but also fully irreversible. It means that no matter what occurs in the brain and body of a liberated being, whether it's distressing events, a neurological disorder, the unintended psychoactive effects of a drug, or puberty, none of this can *induce* the defilements, since they occur at the level of the *citta*, which is and has always been inherently free to take a stand on whatever the brain presents. [268]

> *Suppose there was a mountain that was one solid mass of rock, without cracks or holes. Even if violent storms were to blow up out of the east, the west, the north, and the south, they couldn't make it shake or rock or tremble.*
>
> *In the same way, when a bhikkhu's mind is rightly freed like this, even if intense sights come into the range of the eye, they don't overcome his mind (*******citta*******). His mind remains unaffected. It is steady and immovable, and he maintains perspective of cessation.*
>
> *Even if intense sounds … smells… tastes… touches… mental phenomena come into the range of the mental faculty (mano), they don't overcome his mind (citta). His mind remains unaffected. It is steady and immovable, and he maintains perspective of cessation.*
>
> *—AN 6.55*

Consequently, it's a mistake to believe that the extent of someone's liberation can be ascertained through objective data gathered from their brain or physiology. It's not a guarantee that there would be any difference in that area between an Arahant and an ordinary person, and the latter could very well be confused for the former and vice versa. Hence it is stated in the Suttas that an Arahant cannot be defined or measured in terms of the arisen experience, which of course includes the domain of the brain (or the six-sensed body). Even in the case of the jhānas, an objective basis upon which they depend cannot be determined (AN 11.9, MN 25).

Having considered these points, the possibility of *saṃsāra* or "rebirth" also becomes more tangible without a need for mysticism, questionable metaphysical assumptions, or blind faith. Having recognized that the mind cannot lie within the brain or the body[269] if we operate under the premise that our choices are real, and given that craving is an attitude that is superimposed over (bodily) phenomena and is not inherent to them, it follows that there can be no first point at which craving, and the *citta* for that matter, spontaneously emerged. It could not have suddenly appeared the moment we were conceived, since that would necessarily place it within the same domain as our body and sense organs, and this would mean we are forced to be fettered by it for as long as we live. Furthermore, the root of all is ignorance (*avijjā*): it is impossible to be ignorant of something in the present unless we have been ignorant of that same thing in the past too, and this extends back to the moment of our conception, and the time before that, ad infinitum.

> *"Bhikkhus, no first point of craving for being is evident, before which there was no craving for being, and afterwards it came to be. And although this is said, it is evident that there is a specific support for craving-for-being.*
>
> *I say that craving-for-being is nourished by something, it's not unnourished. And what is the nutriment of craving-for-being? 'Ignorance,' it should be said.*
>
> *—AN 10.62*

[267] The argument that there could be a part of the brain in charge of freedom of choice is untenable. If our actions were solely determined by physical processes, even if some or all of them operated randomly and unpredictably, there would still be no choice or individual responsibility proper: it would always ultimately be "this happened" instead of "I chose to do this". This could easily masquerade as a way of arriving at *anattā and* the cessation of action. But it is a fallacious view, merely rehashed using modern scientific rhetoric, that already existed in the Buddha's time and which he refuted. The Abhidhammic doctrine of "mind moments/processes" is equivalent in spirit, albeit under the guise of idealism instead of materialism. It is motivated by the misconception that any semblance of genuine agency must equal selfhood, failing to see what the sense of self is actually rooted in: the wrong assumptions of permanence, certainty, and satisfaction in relation to our genuinely deliberate choices and what they can achieve.

[268] Which, again, extends as far as affectivity (feelings and moods), not only to so-called "raw sensory data".

[269] And all speculation as to "where" it is is necessarily invalid. The mind is the attitude towards anything and everything that can be found in space, which means that it cannot be *in it.* To be sure, that does not make it permanent or fit to be taken as self or "mine", as already explained.

*For a long time indeed have I been tricked, cheated, and defrauded by this mind (citta)!*

*—MN 75*

This is how a stream-enterer would, owing to their own discernment and not mere faith, know beyond doubt that this life is not the only one. They would know this with the same certainty they understand the Four Noble Truths or any other aspect of the Dhamma, even if they have no concrete idea or explanation of how "rebirth" would actually play out (which is ultimately irrelevant; the value of the recognition lies only in its arousal of dispassion, not theoretical explanation):

*Sāriputta, it is expected of a noble disciple who lives with effort roused up, recollection established, and a composed mind, that they will understand thus: 'This wandering-on (saṃsāra) is indeed beginningless. There is no first discernible point of beings, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, transmigrating and wandering on. But the remainderless fading away and cessation of the mass of ignorance—that is the peaceful and sublime state. That is, the stilling of all activities, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, extinguishment. This knowledge of theirs is their faculty of understanding.*

*—SN 48.50*

The points here established also serve to highlight why the approach taken towards mental cultivation in contemporary Buddhism at large—centered on meditation techniques and similar exercises—is of not only ineffective but, in fact, *counterproductive* in the very goal it's meant to achieve: a purified and pliable *citta*.

Consciously or not, these practices are done to manipulate the states of the brain[270], and one could only regard them as an aid in the path to freedom from suffering by overlooking, as one experiences them, that those states of the brain—feelings and perceptions of forceful nature—cannot themselves be neither suffering nor the cause of it: by not understanding nor making a proper attempt to understand the Noble Truths.[271]

It doesn't take a Buddha to discover that we suffer when disquiet and unpleasant moods arise, and that we wouldn't suffer if they weren't there: everyone knows that, which is precisely why the natural tendency is to seek external pleasures in hopes of replacing those moods with better ones. It does take a Buddha or an enlightened disciple of his to understand craving for what it is, that it alone is the root of suffering, and how to abandon it. Hence, without the Right View of a *sotāpanna*, who is no longer liable to confuse their feelings and moods with craving and vice versa, the majority of one's attempts to rid oneself of suffering are likely to be missing the mark.

The Buddha stated that it's not possible to fulfill Right View, fulfill Right Composure, or abandon the defilements, without having for oneself recognized the "signs" of the mind within the present experience (AN 6.68): anything that one might imagine suffering, craving, or the five hindrances to be before that point will be inaccurate. The only thing every practitioner can be sure about from the beginning is that actions contrary to the precepts involve craving, whether they're able to recognize their *citta* or not, and from this starting point they would have to gradually refine their discernment by sequentially following the Gradual Training (MN 107), in which meditation proper is a very late stage.

To most, the absence of palpable[272] suffering might appear to be all that matters. It isn't, and even then, the way meditation is almost universally practiced brings one to it through the wrong avenue: they get the

[270] An attempt that can be quite successful as proven by scientific studies. The vast majority of practitioners tacitly assume, even when they don't approach meditation through a scientific or secular lens, that their attention span is a measure of their *samādhi*. But *samādhi*, particularly the first *jhāna*, is about the unification of the *citta* (*cittekaggatā*) into wholesome states and an unmuddled perspective, not the unification of the brain's processes into specific objects (AN 11.9, AN 4.12, AN 3.63). The former is a much subtler affair. MN 138 defines "scatteredness" as the presence of *passion* in relation to sense objects; AN 4.77 puts the range or field *(visaya)* of one in jhāna among four things that cannot be delineated. It is not tied down to any particular content or perceptions, and yet the mind *is* undeniably well-unified. What's being described here is evidently not "absorption", but it should not be conflated with so-called "jhāna-lite" nor "open awareness" approaches either. Those are also tangential to the purification of the *citta*, evidenced by how a first-hand recognition of its subtle and indirect nature is not absolutely indispensable for them (SN 47.8).

[271] Naturally, teachers and practitioners will tend to conceptually align the techniques they teach and adhere to with the central Buddhist frameworks, but that doesn't change the reality of what's actually taking place when one succeeds in them.

[272] i.e., positive, which *dukkha* inherently is not, as explained above.

*citta* to a calm state by taking the winds that were blowing on it out of the picture, even if the stated aim is otherwise. The mind itself remains brittle and unable to withstand the full extent of the forces inherent to the body that it's paired with, which would become apparent if circumstances were to push the brain back to baseline. And, quite crucially, sickness, aging, and death are just such type of powerful pressures that one will sooner or later be unable to evade. The liability to suffer on account of them, or of any other unforeseen events that would challenge one *far* beyond one's tolerance threshold, has not fundamentally changed.

> *Three things are coming,*
>
> *like a mass of flame:*
>
> *death, disease, and aging.*
>
> *No power can stand before them,*
>
> *and no speed's enough to flee.*
>
> *—Theragātha 6.13*

The Suttas do mention bodily calm (*kāya-passaddhi*) as an awakening factor, and it is certainly a property of right *samādhi.* But the critical difference is that it comes as a by-product of relinquishing all unwholesome types of volition[273] in regard to the brain's natural tendencies[274]. It is a by-product of giving up the five hindrances, which are always defined as defilements of the *citta (*AN 5.23), and are nourished precisely by misconduct of body, speech, and thought (AN 10.62). Making an effort to appease the body (brain) and what it feels in relation to sense objects, instead of the less palpable *desire to act* that is superimposed over that, is taking things in the wrong order, and inevitably leads to the wrong result:

> *"Bhikkhus, endowed with five factors, a bhikkhu is incapable of attaining right composure (sammāsamādhi): he is unable to endure sights, unable to endure sounds, unable to endure smells, unable to endure tastes, and unable to endure touches."*
>
> *—AN 5.113*[275]
>
> *"Considering how these five hindrances are abandoned in himself, gladness is born. For one who is glad, joy is born.* ******When the mind (citta) is glad, the body calms down.****** *One with a calm body feels at ease. For one who is at ease, the mind becomes composed."*
>
> *—DN 2*
>
> *"Bhikkhus, this mind (citta) is radiant. And it is blemished by adventitious defilements. The unlearned ordinary person does not understand this as it is. Therefore I say that for the unlearned ordinary person, there is no development of the mind."*
>
> *"Bhikkhus, this mind is radiant. And it is liberated from adventitious defilements. A learned noble disciple understands this as it is. Therefore I say that for the learned noble disciple, there is development of the mind."*
>
> *—AN 1.51-52*[276]

[273] *Cetanā,* which, not by coincidence, derives from the same root *√cit* as *citta.*

[274] SN 46.51: paying the wrong type of attention to these natural phenomena is what nourishes the five hindrances, not the *presence* of these phenomena.

[275] In fact, the first jhāna is called "the opening amidst confinement", the "confinement" being the five senses and their agreeable and enticing objects. It's not a separate state where those objects or their pressure are no longer perceived, but a state where the *citta* has not the slightest plan to succumb to them (which is what constitutes all of the five hindrances) no matter how long they last. That is where the sense of joy and safety originates from. Hence it is also said that it is impossible to enter the first jhāna without having thoroughly discerned the danger in sensuality (AN 6.73), since that is what "trains" the mind (SN 35.246) to no longer yield even when cornered on all sides by the body's inclinations—just as a person would refuse any attempts to be thrust into a pit of burning coals (SN 35.244). See also MN 125, specifically the simile of the tamed royal elephant who no longer flinches even in the face of fierce provocation.

[276] The way defilements and suffering superimpose themselves upon what we feel could be compared to two identical panes of glass joined together, except one of them has a colored tint. For one who doesn't know better, it will genuinely seem like there is only *one tinted pane*, and thus in order to get rid of the tint, the entire structure needs to be removed. Similarly, the natural and implied tendency is to want to eliminate or replace the whole arisen experience (particularly unpleasant or strong emotions) when trying to clear away suffering and defilements, and this is precisely what a meditation technique helps one do.

In contrast, virtue—often neglected or insufficiently emphasized in comparison with these widespread techniques—is repeatedly presented in the Suttas as the indispensable precondition and basis for any proper meditation and **samādhi**. Virtue does actually contribute to the development, pliability, and resilience of one's *citta*, though the idea of it is naturally less appealing. This is because virtue in the context of the Dhamma and training is nothing other than abstaining, regardless of the state of the brain at any given time, from any bodily or verbal choices (again, *cetanā*) that would involve craving in relation to said state.[277] At the most elemental level, it partakes in the principle of withstanding and not yielding to one's biology without denying it or trying to make it otherwise, and it is only when established upon this foundation that one's efforts can be upscaled to the more refined planes in which bodily pressures are still being taken up, eventually also resulting in those pressures themselves subsiding, but *for the right reason*.[278]

> *Bhante, it would be great if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in brief, so that having heard it I may dwell alone, withdrawn, heedful, diligent, and resolute.*
>
> *Bhikkhu, you should purify the very foundation of all wholesome qualities. And what is that foundation? Well-purified virtue, and correct view. When your virtue is well purified and your view is correct, then you should develop the four foundations of recollection, founded and established upon virtue.*
>
> *—SN 47.3*[279]

## The Cues of the Mind

*By Bhikkhu Anīgha*

We habitually employ external, objective standpoints to gauge the character of our own actions. Among these are the various possibilities listed below:

> *"Kālāmas, don't go by oral transmission, by lineage, by hearsay, by canonical authority, by logic, by inference, by analysis of properties, by the acceptance of a view after consideration, by the appearance of competence, or by the thought 'The ascetic is our respected teacher.' When you know for yourselves: 'These things are detrimental, blameworthy, criticized by sensible people, and when undertaken, they lead to harm and suffering', then you should give them up.*
>
> *What do you think, Kālāmas? When greed … aversion … muddledness arises* ******internally******* for a person, does it do so for their welfare or harm?"*
>
> *"Harm, Bhante."*
>
> *…*
>
> *"What do you think, Kālāmas, are these things beneficial or detrimental?"*
>
> *"Detrimental, Bhante."*
>
> *"Blameworthy or blameless?"*
>
> *"Blameworthy, Bhante."*
>
> *"Criticized or praised by sensible people?"*
>
> *"Criticized by sensible people, Bhante."*
>
> *"When undertaken, do they lead to harm and suffering, or not? Or how do you see this?"*
>
> *"When undertaken, they lead to harm and suffering, Bhante. That's how we see it."*

[277] Generosity is also extensively emphasized along with virtue in the context of lay practice in the Suttas, while meditation proper comes into the picture only once virtue has been well developed. Generosity not only provides mundane benefits for the brain but also cultivates the *citta,* as it goes against our ingrained biological tendency for possessiveness. This is also why it has a profound effect on one's future births.

[278] This "external" calm will always be temporary, however. See SN 17.30.

[279] It is telling that although the Buddha's interlocutor here (as well as in SN 47.3, SN 47.15-16, SN 47.46-47, AN 4.12, and many others) was already a *bhikkhu*, the importance of virtue still had to be emphasized.

> *"So, Kālāmas, when I said: 'Kālāmas, don't go by oral transmission, by lineage, by hearsay, by canonical authority, by logic, by inference, by analysis of properties, by the acceptance of a view after consideration, by the appearance of competence, or by the thought 'The ascetic is our respected teacher.' But when you know for yourselves: 'These things are detrimental, blameworthy, criticized by sensible people, and when undertaken, they lead to harm and suffering', then you should give them up. That's what I said, and this is why I said it."*
>
> *—AN 3.65*

We also cannot rely on the way we feel to determine what's beneficial and what isn't:

> *"Sights, sounds, tastes, smells,*
>
> *touches, and phenomena, the lot of them—*
>
> *they're said to be likable, desirable, and agreeable*
>
> *for as long as they exist.*
>
> *For all the world with its gods,*
>
> *this is what they deem happiness.*
>
> *And where they cease*
>
> *is deemed as suffering for them.*
>
> *The noble ones have seen as happiness*
>
> *the cessation of personality.*
>
> *This insight of those who see*
>
> *contradicts the whole world.*
>
> *What others call happiness*
>
> *the noble ones say is suffering.*
>
> *What others call suffering*
>
> *the noble ones know as happiness.*
>
> *—Snp 3.12*

This famous teaching given to the Kālāmas can only be followed and all doubts eventually transcended if one becomes aware of what the Suttas call the "sign" or "cue" of the mind (*cittassa nimitta).* This means one must train oneself to recognize the subconscious[280] attitude that drives one's actions by body, speech, or thought at any given time.

Our default mode of being is to be absorbed in whatever our attention is focused on. Almost always, it feels like there is nothing else in our experience but *this* (whatever we happen to be occupied with)[281] . But there always has to be, whether we're aware of it or not, an **attitude** towards "this" that we're implicitly harboring. That background—we may even say "ambiguous"—mode of relating to an experience exists simultaneously with it but on a different plane; one does not come first and the other later. And this attitude is ultimately more general than anything we direct our attention to; it *endures* while our attention goes from this to that, whether the object is internal or external, concrete or abstract, and past, present, or future. It is

[280] The use of this word must be qualified: the dispositions of the mind are not literally "below" your consciousness, which would render them effectively inaccessible. They are *peripheral* to whatever you are centrally conscious of. In other words, they are definitely "there" at all times, but are simply overlooked. And, of course, they are no longer "subconscious" once they cease to be overlooked. This is also what the Suttas refer to as "underlying tendencies" (*anusaya,* lit. "lying down alongside").

[281] We are by default too concerned with objects, and emphasizing that direction further makes things even worse. The Dhamma is not about striving for perfect objectivity or "unbiased" observation: *dukkha* is an entirely personal and subjective affair, and subjectivity can only be properly disowned, as opposed to merely concealed from view while it's in fact still there, if it's first fully acknowledged, taken into account, and understood.

in that peripheral direction to the aspects of experience we tend to wrongly emphasize that both bondage and freedom are found.[282]

Whenever one is unaware of this background frame of mind, one's development of certain things and avoidance of others will *have to* rely on hearsay, reasoning, inference, acquired views, etc., and that alone negates one's efforts, even if they happen to be perfectly in line with the letter of the Buddha's instructions. You don't need to be negligent and forget about the teachings altogether to end up going with the grain of ignorance. All it takes is not clearly seeing where that grain is, irrespective of your earnest attempts to go against it. Hence, the purification of the mind cannot take place fortuitously, by adhering to a prescribed set of instructions without seeing for yourself what and "where" the defilements are on every occasion. All Dhamma instruction you receive is like a map: if you don't know where you currently stand, no matter how accurately the map displays the whole territory and the destination—the cessation of greed, aversion, and delusion—it won't help you get there.

Noticing the current state of the mind is an act of *acknowledging* something that you were previously either covering up or simply overlooking. It has nothing to do with closely observing a continuous flow of experiences[283]. What enables this recognition is not concentration or focus, but self-awareness[284] (the antithesis of concentration) and self-honesty. It's the opposite direction of zooming in to examine the intricate pattern of threads on a piece of fabric and is instead more akin to noticing how your nose is always inevitably at the center of your field of vision, no matter how engrossed you become in the objects you see. This background to your attention cannot be attended to head-on in the same way as things that are seen, heard, thought, etc., for it simply cannot exist in that palpable way.

> "*Sandha, meditate like a thoroughbred, not like a wild colt.*
>
> *And how does a wild colt meditate? A wild colt, tied up by the feeding trough, meditates: 'Fodder, fodder!' Why is that? Because it doesn't occur to the wild colt tied up by the feeding trough: 'What task will the horse trainer have me do today? How should I respond?' Tied up by the feeding trough it just meditates: 'Fodder, fodder!'*
>
> *In the same way, take a certain untrained person who has gone to the forest, the root of a tree, or an empty hut. Their mind is overcome and mired in sensual desire, and they don't understand as it is the escape from arisen sensual desire.* ******Harboring sensual desire internally*******, they meditate and contemplate and cogitate and ruminate. Their mind is overcome by ill will … indolence-and-lethargy … restlessness-and-anxiety … doubt … Harboring doubt internally, they meditate and contemplate and cogitate and ruminate. They meditate dependent on earth, water, fire, and air. They meditate dependent on the extent of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, or neither-perception-nor-non-perception. They meditate dependent on this world or the other world.* ******They meditate dependent on what is seen, heard, thought, cognized, attained, sought, or explored by the mental faculty.******* That's how an untrained person meditates.*
>
> *And how does a thoroughbred meditate? A fine thoroughbred, tied up by the feeding trough, doesn't meditate: 'Fodder, fodder!' Why is that? Because it occurs to the fine thoroughbred tied up by the feeding trough: 'What task will the horse trainer have me do today? How should I respond?' Tied up by the feeding trough they don't meditate: 'Fodder, fodder!' For that fine thoroughbred regards the use of the goad as a debt, a bond, a loss, a misfortune.*

[282] Some actions are on every conceivable instance propelled by the same mind states, which is why they're excluded by the precepts. If it were possible to do them with a clean mind, there would be no issue with them.

[283] All notions of "processes", "streams", "sequences", and "mind-moments" must be put aside in order to understand not only the subject of this essay but the Dhamma in general, which by definition is "not involving time" (*akālika*). One must learn to see every present experience as a *totality*, with general aspects that endure (say, an irritable mood) while other more specific aspects (thoughts about some person or event) shift and change.

[284] In order to properly understand *anattā*, one must first develop thorough self-awareness of the type described here. When you don't, that which you think of as the sense of self will not be the actual sense of self, but a secondary expression of it. The difficulty of transcending ownership is not in making sense of *anattā* per se, but in that one does not fully see the extent of what is, or *can*, be taken as self: one cannot see the *sabbe dhammā* part of *sabbe dhammā anattā*. The inclinations of the mind, due to their lack of tangible detail in comparison to the sense objects and perceptions one is used to, is chief among the phenomena that are liable to be overlooked, and to the extent that you don't see them, the statement, "Everything is not self," doesn't actually apply to them.

*In the same way, take a certain fine thoroughbred person who has gone to the forest, the root of a tree, or an empty hut. Their mind is not overcome and mired in sensual desire, and they understand as it is the escape from arisen sensual desire. Their mind is not overcome by ill will … indolence-and-lethargy … restlessness-and-anxiety … doubt … They don't meditate dependent on earth, water, fire, and air. They don't meditate dependent on the extent of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, or neither-perception-nor-non-perception. They don't meditate dependent on this world or the other world.* ******They don't meditate dependent on what is seen, heard, thought, cognized, attained, sought, or explored by the mental faculty. Yet they do meditate.******

*—AN 11.9*

If you attempt to observe and analyze your agitated mind like you would an object in the world, that would all remain secondary to the internal presence of that restlessness. The only way to become aware of the current tendency of the mind is *indirectly:* while attention is where it is, you try to simultaneously become aware of "how" your mind is at this time,[285] similar to how you would remember the space that you're currently in without having to actually *look* at the walls, floors, and ceiling of the room. This is what would reveal the character of any act you're doing or want to do.

*And how does a bhikkhu abide maintaining perspective of the mind concurrently with the mind?*

*Here, a bhikkhu understands mind with passion as 'mind with passion,' and mind without passion as 'mind without passion.' He understands mind with aversion as 'mind with aversion,' and mind without aversion as 'mind without aversion.' He understands mind with muddledness as 'mind with muddledness,' and mind without muddledness as 'mind without muddledness.' He understands constricted mind as 'constricted mind,' and scattered mind as 'scattered mind.' He understands expansive mind as 'expansive mind,' and unexpansive mind as 'unexpansive mind.' He understands mind that is not supreme as 'mind that is not supreme,' and mind that is supreme as 'mind that is supreme.' He understands mind composed as 'mind composed,' and mind not composed as 'mind not composed.' He understands liberated mind as 'liberated mind,' and unliberated mind as 'unliberated mind.'*

*And so he abides maintaining perspective of the mind concurrently with the mind internally, externally, and both internally and externally. He abides maintaining perspective of the mind as liable to rise, or as liable to wane, or as liable to both rise and wane concurrently with the mind. Or the memory that 'the mind is there' is established for him just to the extent necessary for knowledge and recollection. He abides disengaged, not taking up anything in the world.*

*—MN 10*

Everyone already has at least a minimal capacity to know what state their mind is in, so it's not that this requires uncovering an altogether hidden dimension. The issue is that the untrained individual is usually aware of their mental state only to the degree that it's displayed by their bodily and verbal behavior—meaning when it's quite coarse.[286] Since this is the inevitable starting point, the training of the mind needs to take place "backwards", as it were. Every action is determined as right or wrong by the type of mind underlying it, but since the attitudes driving bodily and verbal acts are much easier to notice compared to what takes place purely on the mental domain, it's necessary to start purifying the former before the subtleties of the latter can start to be revealed. Thus, the purification of mind becomes an option only after the purification of virtue.[287]

Take an act that from an external standpoint would seem pure and even praiseworthy: volunteering for community service, for instance. If you're not aware of your internal intention underneath that, you would

[285] And there is no fixed right answer. The designations you use to describe the status of your mind are secondary; what matters is that they're coming *from* the present awareness of the mind and not the other way around, in which case the designations become abstract and based upon hearsay, reasoning, views, etc.

[286] This is why some people go as far as the view that their own thoughts are "not real", or at least less so, in comparison with the physical world. Similarly, many turn to the sphere of bodily sensations thinking that it can accurately reveal the state of their mind, failing to see that the subtler and most critical aspects of it cannot manifest on that perceptible level no matter how closely they examine it.

[287] And purification of view comes only as a result of the purification of mind (MN 24).

tend to tacitly assume that the action is beneficial due to its external properties, e.g., what other people agree upon as good and how it makes you feel superficially, overlooking the fact that what's really acting as the motivator *for you* at that time could be a simple thirst for company, distraction, idle talk, and perhaps an opportunity to enjoy sense pleasures at some point. In this way, states that lead to your own harm would be unwittingly tolerated, welcomed, and acted upon, potentially even while believing them to be the opposite[288]. The less you are able to pick up the cues of your mind, the more you'd be liable to this sort of unconscious self-sabotage through your own actions. Your mind will never go out of its way to warn you when greed, aversion, or distraction are the ones running the show. Quite the opposite: it actively tries to mislead you.[289]

The same principle extends to the domain of purely mental actions in a much subtler way. You can be applying the mind in beneficial ways on paper, and yet that doesn't stop greedy, averse, and deluded motivations that masquerade as good from propelling your efforts:

> *"Bhikkhus, suppose a foolish, incompetent, unskillful cook was to serve a king or his minister with a vast array of curries: superbly sour, bitter, pungent, and sweet; hot and mild, salty and bland.*
>
> *But that cook didn't pick up the cue of his own master: 'Today, my master preferred this sauce, or he reached for it, or he took a lot of it, or he praised it. Today, my master preferred the sour or bitter or pungent or sweet or hot or mild or salty sauce. Or he preferred the bland sauce, or he reached for the bland one, or he took a lot of it, or he praised it.'*
>
> *That foolish, incompetent, unskillful cook doesn't get presented with clothes, wages, or bonuses. Why is that? Because he doesn't pick up the cue of his own master.*
>
> *In the same way, a foolish, incompetent, unskillful bhikkhu abides maintaining perspective of the body concurrently with the body—diligent, aware, and recollected, having subdued longing and upset in regard to the world. As he abides maintaining perspective of the body concurrently with the body, his mind does not become composed, and the defilements are not given up. He doesn't pick up that cue. … feelings … mind … phenomena …*
>
> *That foolish, incompetent, unskillful bhikkhu doesn't gain comfortable abidings right in the present experience, nor does he gain recollection-and-awareness. Why is that? Because that foolish, incompetent, unskillful bhikkhu does not pick up the cue of his own mind.*
>
> *Suppose an astute, competent, skillful cook was to serve a ruler or their minister with a vast array of curries: superbly sour, bitter, pungent, and sweet; hot and mild, salty and bland.*
>
> *And that cook picked up the cue of his own master: 'Today my master preferred this sauce, or he reached for it, or he took a lot of it, or he praised it. Today my master preferred the sour or bitter or pungent or sweet or hot or mild or salty sauce. Or he preferred the bland sauce, or he reached for the bland one, or he took a lot of it, or he praised it.'*
>
> *That astute, competent, skillful cook gets presented with clothes, wages, and bonuses. Why is that? Because he picks up the cue of his own master.*
>
> *In the same way, a wise, competent, skillful bhikkhu abides maintaining perspective of the body concurrently with the body—diligent, aware, and recollected, having subdued longing and upset in regard to the world. As he abides maintaining perspective of the body concurrently with the body, his mind becomes composed, and the defilements are given up. He picks up that cue. … feelings … mind … phenomena …*
>
> *That wise, competent, skillful bhikkhu gains comfortable abidings right in the present experience, and he gains recollection-and-awareness. Why is that? Because that wise, competent, skillful bhikkhu picks up the cue of his own mind."*
>
> *—SN 47.8*

[288] In certain cases you don't need to completely avoid an external action if you realize it was or would have been wrongly motivated, however. If there is some greater purpose that justifies the activity, remaining mindful not to engage in distraction and carelessness even if the opportunity presents itself would keep the mind clean.

[289] The five aggregates can be compared to a killer in the guise of a polite, loyal, and trustworthy servant (SN 22.85).

The cook would fail to pick up the cues of his master if he's thinking in *objective* terms about which dishes would please the king. Similarly, people often operate from a belief that just following this or that practice, since it's prescribed by the Buddha or a teacher, in itself takes them in the right direction. It's never that simple, so one must be very wary of the tendency to make the Dhamma methodical and structured. That automatically obscures the domain that effort must apply to since the mind is not at all guaranteed to be slanting in the same direction on two different occasions.

The "food" that you provide to the mind, knowingly or unknowingly, is primarily the intention behind your actions and even thoughts, not the actions or thoughts themselves. This is why a *sotāpanna* does not misconceive specific practices and observances (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*) of any kind as vehicles to purity per se: they fully understand that it's about the message they're indirectly passing to their mind at the background, not about what they specifically do, say, or think. In contrast, an ordinary person depends on certain habits and behaviors as proxies to *hopefully* affect the direction their mind is going in. This works neither flawlessly nor permanently, which is why a degree of variation is often necessary.

Let's take the example of **mettā** meditation. If you overlook that ill-will starts with your tacit attitude of not wanting to feel whatever you're currently feeling—if you don't pick up that cue— the entire project of developing *mettā* will be accompanied by a silent aversion at its core, while you generate foreground thoughts and emotions of kindness. Right intention is not established at the right level, which is why the effect of this practice always eventually wears out, like a weed that regrows because it was only trimmed, without touching its roots.

> *Regarding what's not the core as the core,*
>
> *and seeing the core as not the core;*
>
> *they don't get to the core.*
>
> *Wrong intention is their pasture.*
>
> *But having known the core as the core,*
>
> *and what's not the core as not the core;*
>
> *they get to the core.*
>
> *Right intention is their pasture.*
>
> *—Dhp 12*

Constant self-questioning of the motivation behind *whatever* you do is therefore not optional[290], and is closer to right meditation than anything else you might do while taking your intention behind it for granted:

> *What do you think, Rāhula? What is the purpose of a mirror?"*
>
> *"It's for inspection, Bhante."*
>
> *"In the same way, actions of body, speech, and thought should be done only after repeated inspection.*
>
> *When you want to act with the body, you should inspect that act: 'Does this act with the body that I want to do lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? Is it detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering?'*[291] *If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I want to do leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's detrimental, it yields suffering and results in suffering.' To the best of your ability, Rāhula, you should not do such an action. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I want to do doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should do such an action.*

[290] This is where authenticity or self-transparency comes in, hence the Buddha's comparison with looking at oneself in a mirror. One of the main obstacles to being aware of what state the mind is actually in is that one often doesn't even want to admit it, since it takes away the certainty one may have found in adhering to a fixed course of action previously assumed to be always "good".

[291] The affliction is always due to the simultaneously present greed, aversion, or delusion. Whether the outcome of the act is gain or loss, fame or disrepute, praise or blame, or pleasure or pain, is not what matters.

*While you are acting with the body, you should inspect that same act: 'Does this act with the body that I am doing lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? Is it detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering?' If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I am doing leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's unskillful, with suffering as its outcome and result.' Then, Rāhula, you should desist from such an act. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I am doing doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should continue such an act.*

*After you have acted with the body, you should inspect that same act: 'Does this act with the body that I have done lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? Is it detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering?' If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I have done leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering.' Then, Rāhula, you should confess, reveal, and clarify such an act to the Teacher or a sensible fellow renunciate. And having revealed it you should restrain yourself in the future. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I have done doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should live in joy and gladness because of this, training day and night in beneficial qualities.*

*When you want to act with speech, you should inspect that same act: 'Does this act of speech that I want to do lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? …' …*

*If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act of speech that I have done leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering.' Then, Rāhula, you should confess, reveal, and clarify such an act to the Teacher or a sensible fellow renunciate. And having revealed it you should restrain yourself in the future. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act of speech that I have done doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should live in joy and gladness because of this, training day and night in beneficial qualities.*

*When you want to act by thought, you should inspect that same act: 'Does this act by thought that I want to do lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? …' …*

*If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act by thought that I have done leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering.' Then, Rāhula, you should be horrified, repelled, and disgusted by that act. And being repelled, you should restrain yourself in the future. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act by thought that I have done doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should live in joy and gladness because of this, training day and night in beneficial qualities.*

***All**** ******the ascetics and brahmins of the past, future, and present who purify their actions by body, speech, and thought do so after repeatedly inspecting.******* So, Rāhula, you should train yourself like this: 'Repeatedly inspecting, I will purify my actions of body, speech, and thought.' "*

*—MN 61*

This same effort of continuously holding a mirror to one's mind is what defines the practice of mindfulness-and-awareness, which is why, as stated in the simile of the cook discourse further above, there is no proper *satisampajaññā* unless one can pick up the cues of the *citta:*

*"Now, bhikkhus, you might think, 'We have a sense of prudence and fear of wrongdoing, and our bodily, verbal, and mental behavior is pure, our livelihood is pure, our sense doors are guarded, we are moderate in eating, and we are dedicated to vigilance. Just this much is enough. We have achieved the goal of life as an ascetic. There is nothing more to do.' And you might rest content with just that much. I declare this to you, bhikkhus, I announce this to you: 'You who seek to be true contemplatives, do not lose sight of the goal of the contemplative life while there is still more to do.'*

*What more is there to do? You should train yourselves like this: 'We will have mindfulness-and-awareness.*

*We will act with awareness when going out and coming back; when looking ahead and aside; when bending and extending the limbs; when bearing the outer robe, bowl, and robes; when eating, drinking, chewing, and tasting; when urinating and defecating; when walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking, and keeping silent.* [292]'

*—MN 39*

Both **yoniso manasikāra** and the utterance of another are necessary for the acquisition of the right view. The reason is that the right view is about much more than agreeing with universal, impersonal facts and notions you heard or read about. As much as the unenlightened person may agree with the Buddha's declaration of the Four Noble Truths, what they may think of as suffering and craving is not accurate enough[293] simply because they are not sufficiently acquainted with the peripheral aspects of their mind.

"*Bhikkhus, it's impossible that a bhikkhu who enjoys association and company, who is fond of them and is devoted to enjoying them, would enjoy being alone in seclusion. Not enjoying being alone in seclusion, it's impossible that he will take the cues of the mind.* ******Not taking the cues of the mind, it's impossible that he will fulfill Right View. *******Having not fulfilled Right View, it's impossible that he will fulfill Right Composure (sammāsamādhi). Having not fulfilled Right Composure, it's impossible that he will give up the fetters. Having not given up the fetters, it's impossible that he will realize Nibbāna.*

*But, bhikkhus, it's possible that a bhikkhu who doesn't enjoy association and company, who isn't fond of them and isn't devoted to enjoying them, would enjoy being alone in seclusion. Enjoying being alone in seclusion, it's possible that he will take the cues of the mind. Taking the cues of the mind, it's possible that he will fulfill Right View. Having fulfilled Right View, it's possible that he will fulfill Right Composure. Having fulfilled Right Composure, it's possible that he will give up the fetters. Having given up the fetters, it's possible that he will realize Nibbāna."*

*—AN 6.68*

It's important not to expect any kind of sudden epiphanies.[294] Skill in picking up the cues of your own mind is the result of *training*, working against the grain of the tendency to overlook the internal impetus behind your actions, and getting in the habit of judging them as good or bad solely based on that. Over time, it becomes increasingly harder to overlook your own underlying tendencies, and, unlike before, falling prey to them begins to require active negligence as opposed to being the default.

Apart from this effort of radically self-honest reflection, it's also critical to become used to dwelling in seclusion and withdrawal for large portions of the day, not just physically from other people, but also from any distracting engagements, external or otherwise, that would prevent you from maintaining clear awareness and a healthy skepticism of the motivation that lies behind those very activities[295]. This proper seclusion amplifies the symptoms[296] of the core problem even though you may still not be able to see the problem itself. The cues you need to pick up on start to at least show themselves, so resisting the impulse to resolve the symptoms would gradually familiarize you with the *simultaneously present* cause of them, and the true purpose of all the practices taught by the Buddha would start to become apparent.

## Developing Stream-entry

*by Bhikkhu Anīgha*

[292] Note how, in stark contrast to the principles outlined so far, this is frequently interpreted as a careful observation of bodily sensations and movements. This actively obstructs any possibility to pick up on what's happening at the back of one's mind.

[293] *Sotāpatti* is reached by polishing, upgrading, and sometimes even completely overhauling your understanding as many times as it takes based on faith in the utterance of another who reached it themselves, not by embracing your *current* notions of suffering, its origin, and its cessation, and practicing according to them until a result is reached.

[294] There is no abrupt realization of the Dhamma (AN 8.19).

[295] A prominent example of such distractions is meditation techniques.

[296] Which may be too unpleasant if you're not already accustomed to virtue and sense restraint.

**The Nature of Understanding** There are several misconceptions surrounding the subject of stream-entry and attainments in general. One of the most problematic is the tendency to conceive of it as a sudden, unprovoked revelation, epiphany, or glimpse of a mystical kind. In this view, unusual perceptions and experiences that have no intrinsic meaning and can be interpreted in a myriad ways are conflated with *knowledge* or *understanding (paññā).* Understanding cannot arise by itself in the manner that perceptions and experiences do.

Just as in ordinary life, understanding can arise only if you've been *trying to understand* from the get-go. Some individuals can understand things more quickly than others, but no one wakes up one day knowing how to assemble a car from scratch without any prior effort on their part. And yet this is how awakening is often thought to be like, to the point that some people even believe psychoactive drugs can give rise to Buddhist insights. This reveals that what they think of as understanding is just perceptions, as sophisticated and esoteric as they may be[297]. Someone who has no idea how to change the oil of a car's engine can suddenly have intricate visions of moving pistons and turning gears, but a seasoned mechanic's *understanding* of cars is something different, not only in magnitude but in nature, and does not magically follow from the former.

Furthermore, unlike perceptions, understanding is not subjective or individualized, as the Dhamma is sometimes thought to be. Your understanding is either in line with the Dhamma and thus leads to the complete destruction of ignorance and craving in regard to it, or it isn't, and thus there is a *mis*-understanding, which in means ignorance and craving still remain one way or another.

**Purification of Mind -> Purification of View** Whether it's the first stage of awakening or any later one, progress always boils down to the weakening of the fetters, and this progress is always necessarily gradual. *If and when* those fetters have weakened, the understanding that finally destroys them can arise, not before that, and not all of a sudden. This doesn't mean one can anticipate how long that weakening will take, however. All one can do is live in such a way that the fetters are wearing away, indefinitely:

> *"The ocean gradually slants, slopes, and inclines, with no abrupt precipice. In the same way, in this teaching and training, the penetration to higher knowledge comes from gradual training, progress, and practice,* ******not abruptly*******. Having seen this first marvellous and extraordinary quality of this teaching and training, the bhikkhus delight in it."*[298]
> —AN 8.19

> *"Suppose a carpenter or his apprentice sees the marks of his fingers and thumb on the handle of his adze. He doesn't know how much of the handle was worn away today, how much yesterday, and how much previously. He just knows 'it's worn away' once it's already worn away.*
>
> *In the same way, when a bhikkhu lives committed to development, he doesn't know how much of the defilements were worn away today, how much yesterday, and how much previously.* ******He only knows 'they've worn away' once they've already worn away.******* Suppose there was a sea-faring ship bound together with ropes. For six months they deteriorated in the water. Then in the cold season it was hauled up on dry land, where the ropes were weathered by wind and sun. When the clouds soaked it with rain, the ropes would readily weaken and decay. In the same way, when a bhikkhu lives committed to development, his fetters readily weaken and decay."
> —SN 22.101*

[297] Note that perception (*saññā)* does not refer only to primitive sense objects like visual shapes, colors, and sounds. Even the most elaborate philosophical or scientific concepts and explanations are perceptions. And often, explanations of the way experience supposedly works—such as it's being a sequence of infinitesimal "mind-moments", or a stream of interlinked cause-and-effect processes—are confused with understanding. No matter how vivid they become with the help of a concentration technique, these are also just perceptions, and are thus of no more intrinsic value than the sight of a leaf or the sound of a bird. That which is truly supramundane—the knowledge of *any and all* perceptions as impermanent, suffering, and not-self—is a peripheral, contextual recognition that manifests *simultaneously* with the mundane, ordinary content of perceptions, on a structurally different level. If that's understood, chasing after specific perceptions—the entire goal of most modern meditative practices—is seen as futile and misguided. The goal becomes to fortify the right knowledge in regard to the perceptions you encounter in everyday life, since that's where defilements and suffering arise to begin with.

[298] The fact that you get exactly what you put in—no more, no less—is a cause for delight. The fact that nothing can fortuitously enlighten you also means that nothing can fortuitously hold you back.

This is how it was possible for many individuals who met the Buddha to attain the Right View in what seemed like a sudden event during a conversation with him: their starting point was one of weaker fetters and/or stronger faculties to begin with. As he realized when considering whether he should teach the Dhamma to the world, some beings are like lotuses sitting just under the water's surface, ready to rise, while others are still far at the bottom of the pond, with much growth ahead of them.[299]

While one does not have an immediate say over one's faculties, one does have more tangible control over either feeding or starving one's defilements, and sufficiently doing the latter is what unlocks the possibility for understanding to arise no matter how weak one's faculties were at the start.

> *"But friend, might there be another explanation for how a noble disciple is one of right and straight view …?"*
>
> *"There might, friends. A noble disciple understands ignorance, its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation … But what is ignorance? What is its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation? Not knowing suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. This is called ignorance.* ******Ignorance comes with defilements. Ignorance ceases when defilements cease.****** *The practice that leads to the cessation of ignorance is simply this Noble Eightfold Path …"*
> *—MN 9*

In fact, though it's commonplace to assume that passion, aversion, and distraction are a primary concern only for a *sotāpanna* who's attempting to break the next two fetters and achieve non-return, the Buddha says otherwise:

> *…But take a learned noble disciple who has seen the noble ones, and is skilled and trained in the teaching of the noble ones. He's seen true persons, and is skilled and trained in the teaching of the true persons. He understands what things are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. So he attends to things fit for attention and not to things unfit for attention.*
>
> *And what are the things unfit for attention that he doesn't attend to? They are things such that when he attends to them, the unarisen influx of sensuality arises in him, or the arisen influx of sensuality increases, the unarisen influx of being arises in him, or the arisen influx of being increases, the unarisen influx of ignorance arises in him, or the arisen influx of ignorance increases. These are the things unfit for attention that he doesn't attend to.*
>
> *And what are the things fit for attention that he attends to? They are things such that when he attends to them, the unarisen influx of sensuality does not arise in him, and the arisen influx of sensuality is given up, the unarisen influx of being does not arise in him, and the arisen influx of being is given up, the unarisen influx of ignorance does not arise in him, and the arisen influx of ignorance is given up. These are the things fit for attention that he attends to.*
>
> *Because of not attending to things unfit for attention and attending to things fit for attention, unarisen influxes don't arise and arisen influxes are given up.*
>
> *They attend through-the-origin: 'This is suffering' … 'This is the origin of suffering' … 'This is the cessation of suffering' … 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering'. And as they do so, three fetters are given up: personality-view, doubt, and the grasping at virtue-and-duty. These are called the influxes that should be given up by seeing.*
> *—MN 2*
>
> *And what are the defilements of the mind? Longing and immoral greed, ill will, anger, resentment, denigration, contentiousness, jealousy, stinginess, deceit, deviousness, obstinacy, insolence, conceit, arrogance, indulgence, and carelessness are defilements of the mind.*
>
> *A bhikkhu who understands that longing and immoral greed are defilements of the mind gives them up. A bhikkhu who understands that ill will … carelessness is a defilement of the mind gives it up.*

[299] Almost all of us today belong to the latter, since even after receiving manifold times more information on the Dhamma than probably many Arahants had back then, we're still hardly any closer to understanding it.

*Once he has understood these defilements of the mind for what they are, and has given them up, he has absolute confidence in the Buddha: 'That Blessed One is an Arahant, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those who wish to train, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.'*[300]

*He has absolute confidence in the Dhamma: 'The Dhamma is well explained by the Buddha—presently evident, not involving time, verifiable, and goading-on, to be experienced by sensible people for themselves.'*

*He has absolute confidence in the Saṅgha: 'The Saṅgha of the Buddha's disciples is practicing rightly and straightly, practicing the way, the proper course. It consists of the four pairs of people, the eight individuals. This is the Saṅgha of the Buddha's disciples that is worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of donation, worthy of greeting with joined palms, and is the supreme field of merit for the world.'*

*When a bhikkhu has discarded, eliminated, released, given up, and relinquished to this extent, thinking, 'I have absolute confidence in the Buddha … the Dhamma … the Saṅgha,' he realizes the Dhamma and its meaning, and gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. Thinking: 'I have discarded, eliminated, released, given up, and relinquished to this extent,' he realizes the Dhamma and its meaning, and gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he's glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyous, the body becomes calm. When the body is calm, he feels comfort. When he's comfortable, the mind becomes composed. —MN 7*

These descriptions correspond to the Sequential Training so often described in the Suttas, which is the course of practice that tames the mind such that it can see clearly. [301]This taming is not achieved through the repetitive performance of any specific practice or observance: you need to know, on a per-case basis, that your present effort and way of attending to things leads to the non-arising and decrease of sensuality, being, and ignorance.[302] The "method" is self-questioning of any and all of your intentions, including the intention to make the practice methodical and structured.

It's of paramount importance not to leave any gaps in your attempts to purify the mind from unwholesome actions and mental states. It's easy to fall into the attitude of trying to give up only the things that you suppose to be categorical obstacles to stream-entry—usually a gross underestimation—and assuming that anything more is a plus but not essential, and this is a grave mistake.

Firstly, you don't know in advance how far *you* need to take the training for your mind to be sufficiently ripe for the Right View to take root.[303] You don't know to what extent something is obstructing *you* until you've already successfully abandoned it. Secondly, an individual who becomes a *sotāpanna* is still subject to the rest of the fetters not because they deliberately allowed them to stay, but because they resolved to give up all defilements they were aware of, and yet succeeded only partially. You're not getting any closer to seeing that craving is the root of suffering if you still knowingly tolerate it. That attitude in itself would be an impediment, even if externally the actions you perform through it are still in line with the precepts and are not that significant.

Focusing on wearing away the defilements, which will always obstruct an accurate perspective of your experience no matter how earnestly you try to investigate it, ensures that you will create as much space as possible for the full Right View to fit, instead of minimizing the Right View so that it fits in within the space

[300]As pointed out further below, this absolute confidence (*aveccappasāda)* in the Triple Gem is one of the core attributes of a stream-enterer.

[301]One's own actions and habits are what clouds the mind and obstructs discernment; the mind doesn't get clouded accidentally due to lack of skill in meditation. Meditation cannot be practiced properly until one understands this, and contemporary approaches to meditation by and large revolve around repetitively performing practices that one is *told* will lead to the decrease of defilements. But the connection is not immediately apparent beyond the fact that the attention that's put into the concentration practice is attention that won't drift into coarse unwholesome directions. But not paying attention to something for the time being is not the same as giving it up. What's more, even if sensuality can be temporarily held in check in this way, in the case of being (*bhava*) and ignorance, it's not that simple.

[302]The only part that you can "just do" is the precepts. Pretty much everything beyond that won't go in the right direction unless its accompanied by knowledge of what needs to be abandoned, and how to go about that the right way.

[303]As an example, the fact that there are stories of attained lay disciples in the Suttas who only kept the five precepts does not mean that just that will be enough *for you*. Due to the fact that not everyone has the same faculties, you cannot assume yourself to be in the same internal position as somebody else due to an overlap between your external lifestyles (and compared to those laypeople, in many ways there would still be more differences than similarities). This is explained in detail in AN 10.75.

you currently have. You will simply do the work, and whenever enough work has been done[304], if you have enough learning and familiarity with what needs to be understood, understanding will *have to* arise:

> *"Bhikkhus, a farmer has three urgent duties. What three? A farmer swiftly makes sure the field is well ploughed and tilled. Next they swiftly plant seeds in season. When the time is right, they swiftly irrigate or drain the field. These are the three urgent duties of a farmer. That farmer has no special power or ability to say: 'Let the crops germinate today! Let them flower tomorrow! Let them ripen the day after!' But there comes a time when that farmer's crops germinate, flower, and ripen as the seasons change.*
>
> *In the same way, a bhikkhu has three urgent duties. What three? Undertaking the training in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom. These are the three urgent duties of a bhikkhu. That bhikkhu has no special power or ability to say: 'Let my mind be liberated from the influxes through non-assumption today! Or tomorrow! Or the day after!' But there comes a time—as that bhikkhu trains in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom—that their mind is liberated from the influxes through non-assumption.*
>
> *So you should train like this: 'We will have keen interest in undertaking the training in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom.' That's how you should train."*
> *—AN 3.92*
>
> > *Suppose there was a hen with eight or ten or twelve eggs. And she properly sat on them to keep them warm and incubated. Even if that hen doesn't wish: 'If only my chicks could break out of the eggshell with their claws and beak and hatch safely!' Still they can break out and hatch safely. Why is that? Because that chicken with eight or ten or twelve eggs properly sat on them to keep them warm and incubated.*
> >
> > *In the same way, even though a bhikkhu who is committed to development might not wish: 'If only my mind was liberated from the influxes through non-assumption!' Even so, his mind is liberated from the influxes through non-assumption. Why is that? You should say: 'Because of development'. Development in what? Development in the four establishments of recollection, the four right efforts, the four bases of spiritual ability, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven awakening factors, and the noble eightfold path.*
> > *—SN 22.101*

In fact, it's useful to consider that the modern way of thinking about different stages of awakening was very likely not in place in the Buddha's time, and the strict categorizations and lists found in the texts are likely to be a result of compilation of things originally said in various discourses, rather than of the Buddha actually telling people that they don't need to worry about certain defilements and forms of craving until later on, which is clearly counterproductive. This means that for most individuals who became *sotāpannas*, the aim was to tame their minds and free themselves from suffering in the broadest sense.

**Right Practice Begins with Right View** People generally don't take into account the fact that their present understanding of the Dhamma and practice *is* what stands in the way of their attainment of the Right View. There is a tendency to assume that if one just practices in line with one's current understanding, eventually there will arise some sort of experience, vision, or insight that will lend experiential confirmation—read: novel perceptions—to what one knew "only intellectually", thus entering the stream. Meanwhile, one's standpoints, assumptions, and understanding of the path have changed very little, if at all.

In reality, the knowledge of the right way of practice *is* what is acquired at stream-entry, and thus, to the extent you assume that you already understand the practice, you obstruct the possibility of ceasing to be a *puthujjana*. The term "stream" refers to none other than the noble eightfold path, and it is only from stream-entry onwards that one has access to it, which is only natural given that all its factors hinge fully on Right View[305]:

[304] How much time will be required cannot be known in advance, since you cannot know the extent of your own ignorance—you don't know how much you don't know.

[305] The "textbook", mundane definition of things like right speech and right action are particular modes of behavior that can be emulated by any complete beginner (abstinence from false or harsh speech, not killing, etc.) But someone who speaks in the most gentle and amicable way and would not kill a fly even if their life depended on it, yet has an inaccurate view of craving, and thus

*Sāriputta, they speak of 'the stream'. What is the stream?"*

*"Bhante, the stream is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection, and right composure."*

*"Good, good, Sāriputta! For the stream is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection, and right composure.*

*Sāriputta, they speak of 'a stream-enterer'. What is a stream-enterer?"*

*"Bhante, anyone who possesses this noble eightfold path is called a stream-enterer, the venerable of such and such name and clan."*

*"Good, good, Sāriputta! For* ******the one who possesses this noble eightfold path is called a stream-enterer,******* the venerable of such and such name and clan."*
*—SN 55.5*

*"Bhikkhus, someone with five qualities is unable to enter the sure path in regard to beneficial qualities even when listening to the true teaching. What five? They discredit the talk, the speaker, or themselves. They're witless, dull, and stupid.* ******They think they understand what they don't understand.******
*—AN 5.15*

There is an additional, often overlooked dimension to the Right View beyond simply agreeing with the Dhamma intellectually or even experientially, and that is the fact that your *interpretation* and *viewing* of the Dhamma inevitably starts out not being in line with what the Buddha was trying to convey. The terms "suffering" and "craving", for example, are interpreted either overly vaguely or flat-out wrongly by a *puthujjana*, and so even though they may wholeheartedly agree with the statement "craving is the origin of suffering", for them, it doesn't *mean* what it should.

Rectifying your understanding so that *for you* the Four Noble Truths (or any other teaching in the Suttas) mean what the Buddha intended is how you come to "understand them as they really are", and so it could be said that a *sotāpanna* is one who not only agrees with the teaching outwardly, but also interprets it internally as it was meant to be understood.[306]

But this is not the direction where understanding is usually sought. Overlooking that the very interpretations and assumptions they approach the practice with are where their ignorance and wrong view lies, people often set out to gain novel experiences, releases, and insights that take those root misunderstandings and wrong emphases for granted, and which only serve to cement them further.[307]

Many practitioners, if asked directly, will readily admit that they still don't have the Right View. But even if that's what they *say*, internally they may be practicing *as if* they already understand the path, and it's just a matter of time until they become enlightened. However "advanced" and knowledgeable such a person becomes, they will still be within wrong view because they never acknowledged that as their starting point and strove to go beyond it. It's like someone who keeps building higher and higher, but *in the wrong spot*:

*"Bhikkhus, ignorance is foremost in leading to detrimental things, with lack of prudence and dread [of wrongdoing] following right behind. For an ignorant person, sunk in ignorance, wrong view arises. For*

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assumes that it's not found in them when they speak and act kindly when in fact it is, has wrong speech and wrong action in the ultimate sense. "Wrong" not because it's reprehensible or immoral, but simply because it doesn't lead to liberation. On the other hand, the *right* abstinence from harsh speech and killing, which may look the same externally, naturally follows from the right understanding of craving of a noble disciple, and thus it *does* lead to the final destruction of craving. The factors of the noble eightfold path are defined by what they are founded upon and lead to, not solely by how they are described. If that weren't the case, following it would be a trivial matter.

[306] And the measure for that alignment is no longer being liable to suffering. Not because you are now skilled at circumventing or ameliorating it *with* the Dhamma, but because you're simply not touched by displeasure in the first place even when it arises.

[307] One of the most common and unspoken misinterpretations we all start with is that craving is given up when the objects that induce it are no longer present in the mind. This happens to be the tacit view behind all meditation techniques regardless of their particular differences—which makes their approachability unsurprising—and it puts both the problem and its solution on the level of *what* is being experienced, instead of taking responsibility for one's own craving regardless of what's being experienced. The problem is, in this view, not that your dog is untrained and misbehaves in certain situations, but that those situations *occur*. As a matter of course, Nibbāna is then misconceived as some sort of altered state where the contents of experience are entirely different (or have vanished altogether), rather than as the cessation of passion, craving, being, ownership, and anxiety in the face of whatever is experienced.

*one of wrong view, wrong intention arises. For one of wrong intention, wrong speech arises. For one of wrong speech, wrong action arises. For one of wrong action, wrong speech arises. For one of wrong speech, wrong livelihood arises. For one of wrong livelihood, wrong effort arises. For one of wrong effort, wrong recollection arises. For one of wrong recollection, wrong composure arises.* ******For one of wrong composure, wrong knowledge arises. For one of wrong knowledge, wrong liberation arises.******

*Knowledge is foremost in leading to beneficial things, with prudence and dread [of wrongdoing] following right behind. For a wise person, one attained to knowledge, right view arises. For one of right view, right intention arises. For one of right intention, right speech arises. For one of right speech, right action arises. For one of right action, right speech arises. For one of right speech, right livelihood arises. For one of right livelihood, right effort arises. For one of right effort, right recollection arises.For one of right recollection, right composure arises. For one of right composure, right knowledge arises. For one of right knowledge, right liberation arises."*
*—AN 10.105*

"*Bhikkhus, I will teach you the inferior person and the one who is worse than the inferior person. I will teach you the superior person and the one who is better than the superior person. Listen to that….*

"*And what, bhikkhus, is the inferior person? Here someone is of wrong view … wrong composure. This is called the inferior person.*

"*And what, bhikkhus, is the one who is worse than the inferior person? Here someone is of wrong view …* ******wrong composure*******,* ******wrong knowledge, wrong liberation. This is called the one who is worse than the inferior person.******[308]

"*And what, bhikkhus, is the superior person? Here someone is of right view … right composure. This is called the superior person.*

"*And what, bhikkhus, is the one who is better than the superior person? Here someone is of right view … right composure, right knowledge, right liberation. This is called the one who is better than the superior person."*
*—SN 45.26.*

Prior to the Right View, instead of your practice consisting of cultivating what you currently think or were told mindfulness is, for example, it should revolve around questioning and revising your interpretation of what mindfulness is. Unless you're already a *sotāpanna*, you need to be ready to scrap *all* of your assumptions about the Dhamma, down to the most basic and elemental, and start from square one as many times as it takes. And this is not just a theoretical affair: it's a *training* too,[309] just not the one most people necessarily want to do even though it's the one they really need.

It's exactly like someone who's totally new to a specific sport. Their training regimen cannot be the same as an elite athlete of that discipline, whose goal is to jump as high as possible, run as fast as possible or as long as possible, or defeat the best players in the world. They would have to dedicate most of their time to building a foundation by doing comparatively unexciting mobility drills, taking technique lessons, and building their overall fitness before they can shift their focus onto winning championships or breaking world records. Prioritizing performance would at that point actively prevent them from perfecting the fundamentals, reinforce incorrect habits or movement patterns that may be harder to undo later, and easily result in injury.

The *sotāpanna* or higher is one who has acquired the fundamentals—the four noble truths, the five faculties/powers, the seven awakening factors, the noble eightfold path, etc.—by understanding them. Thus,

[308] This highlights how the fact that something makes one feel more calm, peaceful, or even wise as a *puthujjana* does not automatically mean it's right, and thus it should be taken with a grain of salt even then.

[309] Such rectification of views can only take place on the basis of purification of mind, which is in turn enabled by virtue and restraint, i.e. not engaging in greedy, averse, or distracting actions by body, speech, or mind throughout your daily life. There is next to no intrinsic overlap between this and becoming skilled in concentration techniques, conventionally regarded as the means for mental purification.

they can from then onwards focus on the further *development* of those fundamentals. That's why they're called a *trainee (sekha):*

> *"There are, bhikkhus, these two powers. What two? The power of reflection and the power of development. And what, bhikkhus, is the power of reflection? It's when someone reflects: 'Misconduct of body, speech, or thought has a bad result both right in the present experience and in the future.' Reflecting like this, they give up misconduct by way of body, speech, and thought, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and thought, keeping themselves pure. This is called the power of reflection.*
>
> *"There are, bhikkhus, these two powers. What two? The power of reflection and the power of development. And what, bhikkhus, is the power of reflection? It's when someone reflects: 'Misconduct of body, speech, or thought has a bad result both right in the present experience and in the future.' Reflecting like this, they give up misconduct by way of body, speech, and thought, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and thought, keeping themselves pure. This is called the power of reflection.*
>
> *And what, bhikkhus, is the power of development? In this context,* ******the power of development is the power of the trainees.******* For******* relying on the power of a trainee*******, one gives up passion, aversion, and muddledness.[310] Having given up passion, aversion, and muddledness, one does not do anything detrimental; one does not engage in anything harmful. This is called the power of development. These are the two powers."*
>
> *"There are, bhikkhus, these two powers. What two? The power of reflection and the power of development. And what, bhikkhus, is the power of reflection? It's when someone reflects: 'Misconduct of body, speech, or mind has a bad result both right in the present experience and in the future.' Reflecting like this, they give up misconduct by way of body, speech, and thought, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and thought, keeping themselves pure. This is called the power of reflection.*
>
> *And what, bhikkhus, is the power of development? It's when a bhikkhu develops the awakening factors of recollection, discernment of phenomena, effort, joy, calm, composure, and equanimity, which rely on withdrawal, dispassion, and cessation, and ripen in relinquishment. This is called the power of development. These are the two powers."*[311]
> *—AN 2.11-12*

**Don't Neglect Faith**

Another important aspect that is often overlooked is the group of traits most often attributed to *sotāpannas* in the Suttas. It's not a transcendental "fruition experience" or a mystical "taste of Nibbāna" that they got one fateful evening. It's four factors that, though they sound less glamorous, are immeasurably more important to achieving the goal of freedom from suffering:

> *"So, Ānanda, I will teach you the explanation of the Dhamma called 'the mirror of the teaching'. A noble disciple who has this may declare of themselves: 'I've finished with rebirth in hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. I've finished with all places of loss, bad places, the underworld. I am a stream-enterer! I'm not liable to be reborn in the underworld, and am bound for awakening.'*
>
> *And what is that mirror of the teaching?*
>
> *Here, the noble disciple possesses absolute confidence in the Buddha thus: 'That Blessed One is an Arahant, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those who wish to train, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.'*

[310] A trainee is defined as one who understands these roots of the unwholesome, and that's precisely why they're in the position to abandon them. A *puthujjana* has a very limited ability to recognize greed as greed, aversion as aversion, and delusion as delusion, and so if they never strive to upgrade their criteria for what constitutes a defilement, they will continue being driven by them unwittingly.

[311] See SN 47.30, which states that the awakening factors are *acquired* by the *sotāpanna*, whereas its often assumed that a *puthujjana* would become a *sotāpanna* by developing those factors. The same applies for all other wings to awakening: the five faculties are only present in noble ones (SN 48.12), the noble eightfold path begins with stream-entry as quoted above, and the four foundations of mindfulness hinge on not just purified virtue but also right view (SN 47.3).

*He possesses absolute confidence in the Dhamma thus: 'The Dhamma is well explained by the Blessed One—presently evident, not involving time, verifiable, and goading-on, to be experienced by sensible people for themselves.'*

*He possesses absolute confidence in the Saṅgha thus: 'The Saṅgha of the Buddha's disciples is practicing rightly and straightly, practicing the way, the proper course. It consists of the four pairs of people, the eight individuals. This is the Saṅgha of the Buddha's disciples that is worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of donation, worthy of greeting with joined palms, and is the supreme field of merit for the world.'*

*He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones—unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, liberating, praised by the wise, not clung to, and conducive to composure.*

*This is that mirror of the teaching."*
*—DN 16*

The purpose of faith, trust, or confidence is purely pragmatic, and it shouldn't be confused with blind piety, loyalty, or religious zeal, which are all on the side of clinging to virtue-and-duty (*sīlabbatapārāmāsa*).

Its function is to put you in a position of readiness to question and revise your actions, views, and assumptions to align them with the Buddha's teaching further, never assuming that they're already aligned enough. A defining quality of the right kind of faith is that it's not just a matter of principle: it pushes you to be diligent and make effort to achieve a goal, and not just to take on this or that theoretical view.

This is how progress comes about even for a *sotāpanna*[312], and it's why *saddhā* is the first of the five faculties: it's what allows one to go "against the grain" as much as is actually required, instead of only to the degree that's convenient, not too unpleasant, or simply assumed to be necessary by underestimation. Wisdom, understanding, or intuition cannot be relied on at the expense of faith, especially until one is fully free from ignorance, since it can and very often will be biased by craving—a parasite that always finds the most inconspicuous of ways to linger.

Therefore, given how there is often a tendency to put all the emphasis on wisdom, it's important to recognize that it doesn't matter what deep insights your practice seems to be giving rise to if it's not also resulting in this type of grounded, unshakable confidence in the Triple Gem. If so, it's not actually leading you to stream-entry, because the right faith and the right understanding are totally inseparable.

A *puthujjana* does not have this level of faith, and fabricating it should not be the goal, as that would just result in blind and hollow conviction. Rather, it's a natural and necessary byproduct of comprehending the Four Noble Truths that there is no room for doubt regarding the one who discovered them, his teaching, and others who one can see have also rightly understood it for themselves. This is why the Right View is the ultimate guarantee of harmony in a community. Less-than-unshakable faith should thus be taken as an *indirect* sign that the Four Noble Truths have not really been understood.

A form of faith that a *puthujjana* can and should implement is to operate perpetually with the context that what they think is in line with the Dhamma may well ultimately not be, no matter how much sense it makes, and that there are those who know better and whose advice is worth taking to heart even when it goes against the grain of their preferences. This is what would allow them to take the often-unpleasant process of abandoning their cherished wrong views to the extent necessary to arrive at the Dhamma:

"*Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has not given up five obstinacies and cut off five shackles of mind,* ******it's not possible for him to achieve growth, improvement, or maturity in this teaching-and-discipline.******

*What are the five obstinacies he hasn't given up? Firstly, a bhikkhu has doubts about the Teacher. He's uncertain, undecided, and lacking confidence. This being so, his mind doesn't incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the first obstinacy he hasn't given up.*

*Furthermore, a bhikkhu has doubts about the Dhamma … This is the second obstinacy.*

*He has doubts about the Saṅgha … This is the third obstinacy.*

[312]See AN 6.65, where a lack of faith is one of the things obstructing the attainment of non-return.

*He has doubts about the training … This is the fourth obstinacy.*

*Furthermore, a bhikkhu is angry and upset with his fellow renunciates, resentful, and obstinate. This being so, his mind doesn't incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the fifth obstinacy he hasn't given up. These are the five obstinacies he hasn't given up.*
*—MN 16*

*"For a disciple who has faith in the Teacher's message and lives to penetrate it, what accords with the Dhamma is this: 'The Blessed One is the Teacher, I am a disciple. He is the one who knows, not I.'*
*—MN 70*

*"It was, and is, my attitude towards the Suttas that, if I find anything in them that is against my own view, they are right, and I am wrong."*
*—Ven. Ñāṇavīra Thera*

*"Bhikkhus, I say that attention from the origin (yoniso manasikāra) has a nutriment; it's not without a nutriment. And what is the nutriment for attention through the origin? '*******Faith'*******, it should be said."*[313]
*—AN 10.61*

*"There are two conditions for the arising of right view: the words of another and* ******attending from the origin (yoniso manasikāra).****** *These are the two conditions for the arising of right view."*
*—MN 43*

Just as with a physical illness, the necessary condition for faith in the context of the Dhamma is the honest recognition of the peril that you find yourself in—not knowing the way out of suffering. If you're not too bothered by the idea of remaining where you are now, there is no basis for faith:

*"I say, bhikkhus, that faith too has a proximate cause; it does not lack a proximate cause. And what is the proximate cause for faith? It should be said: suffering.*
*—SN 12.23*

*"And what is the result of suffering? There are some cases in which a person overpowered by suffering, overcome with suffering, grieves, sorrows, laments, beats his breast, and becomes bewildered. Or one overpowerd by suffering, overcome with suffering, comes to search outside, 'Who knows a way or two to the cessation of this pain?' I tell you, bhikkhus, that suffering results either in bewilderment or in search. This is called the result of suffering.*
*—AN 6.63*

Thus, the sense of urgency to "cure" oneself is the requisite condition for faith, which is the requisite condition for applying the treatment to the extent necessary.

Contrary to many mainstream views, there is no room for contentment or satisfaction with one's situation for as long as one isn't at least a *sotāpanna*[314]. In fact, the Buddha frequently urged even noble disciples who *do* understand the escape from suffering not to become satisfied. What then can be said of a *puthujjana*, who isn't just vulnerable to suffering to a much greater degree, but also doesn't understand the way out of that predicament?

*"Bhikkhus, if one's clothes or head were ablaze, what should be done about it?"*

*"Bhante, if one's clothes or head were ablaze, one should arouse the utmost desire, effort, perseverance, unremitting exertion, and recollection-and-awareness to extinguish them.*

*"Bhikkhus, when the Four Noble Truths have not been comprehended—looking on equanimously even at one's blazing clothes or head, not paying attention to them—one should arouse the utmost desire, effort, perseverance, unremitting exertion, and recollection-and-awareness to comprehend them as they are. What four? The noble truth of suffering … the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.*

[313] You can't see, let alone address the problem at its origin, womb, or core (*yoni)* if you don't have faith/trust in the instruction to dig and question further than your own intuition inclines you to.

[314] Contentment regarding material things is beneficial and should be fostered; satisfaction with one's internal development is what should not be tolerated.

*"Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: 'This is suffering.'… An exertion should be made to understand: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.' "*
*—SN 56.34*

*"Bhikkhus, suppose there was a man with a lifespan of a hundred years. And someone might say to him: 'Come now, my good man, they'll strike you with a hundred spears in the morning, at midday, and in the late afternoon. And you'll live for a hundred years being struck with three hundred spears every day. But when a hundred years have passed, you will comprehend the four noble truths you don't yet comprehend.'*

*For a clansman intent on [his own] benefit, this is sufficient reason to submit.*

*Why is that? Wandering-on (saṃsāra) has no known beginning. No first point is found of blows by spears, swords, arrows, and axes. But even though this may be so, the comprehension of the four noble truths doesn't come with pain or sadness, I say. Rather, the comprehension of the four noble truths comes only with comfort and happiness, I say. What four? The noble truths of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path.*

*"Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: 'This is suffering.'… An exertion should be made to understand: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.' "*
*—SN 56.35*

*"Bhikkhus, suppose the Himalayas, the king of mountains, was worn away and eroded except for seven pebbles the size of mustard seeds.*

*What do you think, bhikkhus? Which is more: the portion of the Himalayas, the king of mountains, that has been worn away and eroded, or the seven pebbles the size of mustard seeds that are left?"*

*"Bhante, the portion of the Himalayas, the king of mountains, that has been worn away and eroded is certainly more. The seven pebbles the size of mustard seeds are tiny. Compared to the Himalayas, it's not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part."*

*"In the same way, for a noble disciple accomplished in view, an individual with comprehension, the suffering that's over and done with is more, what's left is tiny. Compared to the mass of suffering in the past that's over and done with, it's not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part, since there are at most seven more lives. That's how very beneficial it is to comprehend the Dhamma and to gain the Dhamma-eye."*
*—SN 13.10*

*"Bhikkhus, suppose a man was to place down on Sineru, the king of mountains, seven pebbles the size of mung beans.*

*What do you think, bhikkhus? Which is more: the seven pebbles the size of mung beans, or Sineru, the king of mountains?"*

*"Bhante, Sineru, the king of mountains, is certainly more. The seven pebbles the size of mung beans are tiny. Compared to Sineru, it's not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part."*

*"In the same way, compared with the achievements of a noble disciple accomplished in view, the achievements of the ascetics, brahmins, and wanderers of other religions is not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part. So great is the achievement of the person accomplished in view, so great is their comprehension."*
*—SN 13.11*

*"Bhikkhus, I have gotten to know two qualities: discontent with regard to beneficial qualities, and unrelenting exertion. Relentlessly I exerted myself, (thinking,) 'Gladly would I let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if I have not attained what can be attained through manly fortitude, manly effort, manly striving, there will be no relaxing my effort.' From this heedfulness of mine was awakening attained. From this heedfulness of mine was the unsurpassed safety from bondage.*

*"You, too, monks, should relentlessly exert yourselves, (thinking,) 'Gladly would I let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if I have not attained what can be attained through manly fortitude, manly effort, manly striving, there will be no relaxing my effort.' You, too, will soon abide having comprehended, realized, and entered upon for yourself, right in the present experience, the supreme goal of the renunciate life for which clansmen rightly go forth from the lay life into homelessness.'*
*—SN 2.5*

*Not based on laxity,*

*not based on little fortitude,*

*is this Nibbāna attainable—*

*the liberation from all suffering.*
*—SN 21.4*

## Stepwise Training

by Bhikkhu Anīgha

The training of the mind fundamentally boils down to restraining and abandoning what's unwholesome (greed, aversion, delusion) and cultivating and maintaining what's wholesome (non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion). In an ideal scenario, these instructions would suffice to take an individual all the way to Arahantship. But the reality is that we start out not being able to tell with certainty what's wholesome or unwholesome in our own minds. There is bound to be a great deal of confusion when trying to make that distinction, which is why the idea of a method, technique, or observance that bypasses the toil required to gain such clarity—something that you can safely assume to be wholesome without needing to understand for yourself *why* it is so—is quite appealing.

What the Buddha devised to address this was nothing along the lines of a modern meditation technique, which solves the problem by turning a blind eye to it, but rather the "Stepwise Training" (*anupubbasikkhā).* This is the closest thing to a methodical practice that he taught:

*" 'Master Gotama, in this stilt longhouse we can see sequential progress down to the last step of the staircase. Among the brahmins we can see sequential progress in learning the chants. Among archers we can see sequential progress in archery. Among us accountants, who earn a living by accounting, we can see sequential progress in calculation. For when we get an apprentice we first make them count: 'One one, two twos, three threes, four fours, five fives, six sixes, seven sevens, eight eights, nine nines, ten tens.' We even make them count up to a hundred. Is it possible to similarly describe a sequential training, sequential progress, and sequential practice in this teaching and discipline?'*

*'It is possible, brahmin. Suppose a deft horse trainer were to obtain a fine thoroughbred. First of all, he'd make it get used to wearing the bit. In the same way, when the Realized One gets a man for training, he first guides him like this: 'Come, bhikkhu, live fulfilling virtue and the training rules. Live restrained by the code of conduct, endowed with proper behavior and a suitable environment. Seeing danger in the slightest fault, train in the training rules…'*

*When the bhikkhu is virtuous, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, guard your sense doors…'*

*When the bhikkhu has his sense doors guarded, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, be moderate in eating…'*

*When the bhikkhu eats in moderation, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, be committed to vigilance…'*

*When the bhikkhu is committed to vigilance, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, be possessed of recollection-and-awareness…'*

*When the bhikkhu is possessed of recollection-and-awareness, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, frequent a secluded lodging—a wilderness, the root of a tree, a hill, a ravine, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a forest, the open air, a heap of straw…'*

*He gives up these five hindrances, defilements of the mind that weaken understanding. Then, quite disjoined from sensuality, disjoined from unwholesome phenomena, with thinking and with pondering, with joy and comfort born of separation, he abides having entered upon the first jhāna… second jhāna… third jhāna… fourth jhāna…*

That's how I instruct the bhikkhus who are trainees—who haven't achieved their goal, but live aspiring to the supreme safety from the yoke.'"

*—MN 107*

If a beginner is told to purify their mind from the five hindrances—which is often all the detail the Suttas give, and not by accident—they will not succeed, no matter how much theoretical information they are given about what the hindrances are. Like a blind person needing to be told in what direction to walk, the most they could do is try to follow a directive that they can only *assume* or *infer*—based on tradition, hearsay, or logic—will get rid of those very subtle forms of unwholesomeness, such as keeping their attention on a meditation object, repeating a mantra, or contemplating a certain idea. They would only be able to gauge success through secondary criteria, such as what they experience and how they feel, and not through a direct discernment of whether the hindrances are still present. They cannot see the hindrances *in their own right*, as things that they can either choose to engage with or not, and because of that, there is no way that they can truly abandon them.[315] This is why presenting meditation as the *gateway* to Buddhism, as is usually done, is such a grave mistake. In reality, the meditation the Buddha taught represents the most refined stage of the training, and many Suttas go as far as stating that only attained individuals are in a position to rightly develop it. [316],[317]

But what even the most uninitiated individual can recognize as a choice they're responsible for—and thus can abstain from—is the breaking of the precepts: coarse, visible actions of body and speech. This is why the training starts there. They would likely still encounter doubts and confusion at certain times when striving to keep the precepts, but their discernment of what is wholesome and unwholesome will not be *that* far below what's required for the task: purifying their virtue is a realistic goal given their current position.

Once their virtue is purified,[318] their discernment of *kusala* and *akusala* will have been refined, making sense restraint the next, slightly loftier goal in the same line of development. Since it involves the same principle that underpins virtue but on a subtler level, they would now have some ability to discern the motivation behind their looking, listening, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, i.e., whether it's greed or non-greed, aversion or non-aversion, or distraction or non-distraction. That internal clarity is what would guide their efforts, so a static, externally-prescribed observance of *always* avoiding specific sights, sounds, etc., in the name of sense restraint—which would only ignore and further obscure the whole dimension of intentionality—would be redundant.

In this way, a person would gradually become more familiar with their own mind, which is the prerequisite

[315] At best, they can "suppress" them, which is another way of saying "giving up on the actual task and shifting attention elsewhere". It's no coincidence that meditation is commonly viewed as the means to "suppress" the hindrances.

[316] In fact, there is no record of the Buddha teaching any sort of meditation to lay people unless they were at least *sotāpanna*s, and mindfulness of breathing—counterfeit versions of which are nowadays more widespread than even the most basic tenets of Buddhism, such as virtue, renunciation, and relinquishment—never appears in a discourse where householders are said to be present.

[317] Since each stage of the training builds upon the discernment and fortitude of mind developed by all the previous ones, it is categorically impossible for a person to succeed in meditation (the cleansing of the hindrances) without succeeding in virtue, sense restraint, etc. The fact that this often *does* seem to happen in many modern traditions that see meditation as essential and everything else as a helpful but ultimately optional accessory speaks to how severely they diverge from what the Buddha actually taught. It clearly should be the other way around if we go by the Suttas: virtue, restraint, and a degree of renunciation are not negotiable, while "formal" meditation enters the picture only for the few who are dedicated enough to have fulfilled its prerequisites: monastics, or laypeople who live as such. And even then, unless they have the Right View, their task would be to *understand* what it is that should be developed in meditation, and not to meditate per se.

[318] As is often mentioned in the Suttas, this doesn't mean keeping the precepts by the letter and nothing more. One needs to live "seeing the danger in the slightest fault," which means that one's virtue needs to encompass actions of body and speech—even of mind, to an extent—that may not be strictly against the precepts, but can be seen to be rooted in greed, aversion, or distraction.

for attaining the Right View: the understanding of what's wholesome and unwholesome that goes to the very root, leaving nothing out, and leads to the complete destruction of suffering when recollected and followed.

With that understanding in place, the only right meditation—the one that is not driven by nor further fuels any unseen defilements, and thus cannot be encapsulated by any form of static and methodical instruction[319]—becomes possible.

## Stream-Entry Requires Celibacy

**by Bhikkhu Anīgha**

### The Five Hindrances

> "Bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu who has not given up these five obstructions, hindrances that invade the mind and weaken understanding, would, with his weak and feeble understanding, know what is for his own benefit, for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both, or realize a superhuman distinction amounting to the knowledge and vision of a noble one—that is not possible.
>
> Bhikkhus, suppose there was a far-reaching mountain stream with a fast current, with much carrying power. Then a man would open irrigation channels on both banks. Thus, bhikkhus, the current in the middle of the river would be scattered, dispersed, and divided. It would not be far-reaching, have a fast current, or have much carrying power.
>
> In just this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu who has not given up these five obstructions, hindrances that invade the mind and weaken understanding, would, with his weak and feeble understanding, know what is for his own benefit, for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both, or realize a superhuman distinction amounting to the knowledge and vision of a noble one—that is not possible.
>
> But, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu who has given up these five obstructions, hindrances that invade the mind and weaken understanding, would, with his powerful understanding, know what is for his own benefit, for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both, or realize a superhuman distinction amounting to the knowledge and vision of a noble one—that is possible.
>
> Bhikkhus, suppose there was a far-reaching mountain stream with a fast current, with much carrying power. Then a man would close the irrigation channels on both banks. Thus, bhikkhus, the current in the middle of the river would not be scattered, dispersed, and divided. It would be far-reaching, have a fast current, and have much carrying power.
>
> In just this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu who has given up these five obstructions, hindrances that invade the mind and weaken understanding, would, with his powerful understanding, know what is for his own benefit, for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both, or realize a superhuman distinction amounting to the knowledge and vision of a noble one—that is possible."
>
> —AN 5.51

It is common knowledge that to understand the Dhamma, one needs to be free from the five hindrances. But because of prevalent misconceptions about what the hindrances are, it is not so common to see that this freedom cannot take place for one who is not celibate.

The hindrances are not momentary disturbances that one can overcome simply by shifting attention away from them. They are the framework through which an untamed mind experiences the entire world constantly, including the past and the future.

[319] Which is why there aren't any in the Suttas. Not due to a slip on anyone's part, nor because there wasn't the intellectual sophistication required to invent such descriptions in those days.

So, no matter where your attention goes, you are under the hindrance of sensuality if you currently *would* become elated at the offer of sensual pleasure. It does not matter if no sensual pleasures present themselves in reality; the framework of lust, ill will, laziness, etc., is already weighing down on you *now*, influencing your choices and the way you attend to things, if *now* those mental states *could* flare up.

The similes the Buddha used to describe the hindrances should be enough to realize that they don't work the way most people think:

> Suppose a man who had gotten into debt applied himself to work, and his efforts proved successful. He would pay off the original loan and have enough left over to support his wife. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> Suppose a man was sick, suffering, and gravely ill. He would lose his appetite and get physically weak. But after some time, he would recover from that illness, and regain his appetite and his strength. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> Suppose a man was imprisoned in a jail. But after some time, he was released from jail, safe and sound, with no loss of wealth. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> Suppose a man was a bondservant. He would not be his own master, but be indentured to another, unable to go where he wishes. But after some time, he would be freed from servitude. He would be his own master, not indentured to another, an emancipated individual able to go where he wishes. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> Suppose a man with wealth and property was traveling along a perilous desert road, with nothing to eat. But after some time, he crossed over the desert safely, arriving within a safe village free of peril. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> In the same way, the bhikkhu regards these five hindrances that are not given up in him as a debt, a disease, a prison, slavery, and a desert crossing.
>
> But when these five hindrances are given up in him, the bhikkhu regards this as freedom from debt, good health, release from prison, emancipation, and a place of safety at last.
>
> —MN 39

Being in debt doesn't mean creditors will harass you every single instant of your life. Even a prisoner doesn't have to face acute pain constantly; he might even experience less pain than some free people do at times. What all these five cases share in common is that even if everything is going relatively well, you can never be fully relaxed because the disturbance *could* return at any moment. The bulk of the misfortune is on the level of a never-ending *looming threat,* not just your observable, moment-to-moment situation.

Therefore, that there might be no sensual craving at specific times doesn't mean you're free from the hindrance. Even the wildest minds will experience occasional disinterest in sensuality, and that does not at all mean they are clear and pliable enough to see the Dhamma.

**Incelibacy Automatically Implies Hindrances**

The question that matters is: *can* sensual prospects move you? Do you sense the possibility that, if you are at the wrong place at the wrong time, the debt collectors will come for you?

If you presently plan to engage in sexual intercourse at any point in the future, even in a subsequent life, then you don't even need introspection to find the answer. It is already a sound "**Yes.**" By having such plans at the back of your mind, you are being moved ***now***, regardless of how far away in the future they are.

> … What are the five shackles of mind he has not severed?
>
> Firstly, a bhikkhu is not without passion, desire, fondness, thirst, burning, and craving for sensuality. This being so, his mind does not incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the first shackle of mind he has not severed. …

He leads the celibate life for the sake of a certain heavenly existence, thinking: 'By this precept or observance or austerity or celibate life, may I become one of the gods!' This being so, his mind does not incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the fifth shackle of mind, he has not cut off. These are the five shackles of mind, he has not cut off.

When a bhikkhu has not abandoned these five obstinacies and cut off these five shackles of mind, it is not possible for him to achieve growth, improvement, or maturity in this teaching-and-discipline. …

—MN 16

"But, Master Gotama, what then is a breach, a hole, a blemish, a stain in the celibate life?"

"Here, brahmin, some ascetic or brahmin, while declaring himself to lead the celibate life correctly, does not engage in sexual intercourse with women. Yet he accepts from women rubbing, massaging, bathing, or bodily anointing. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. This too, brahmin, is a breach, a hole, a blemish, a stain in the celibate life. This is called one who leads an impure celibate life. Bound by the bondage of sexuality, he is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. He is not freed from suffering, I say."

"Furthermore, brahmin, some ascetic or brahmin, while declaring himself to lead the celibate life correctly, does not engage in sexual intercourse with women, nor accepts rubbing or bathing from them; yet he jokes, plays, and amuses himself with them. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not joke, play, or amuse himself with women; yet he looks at them with an eye of longing, gazing intently at their eyes. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not gaze at women with an eye of longing; yet he listens to the sound of women—whether behind a wall or behind a fence—laughing, talking, singing, or crying. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not listen to the sound of women behind a wall or fence; yet he recalls the times when, in the past, he laughed, talked, and played with women. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not recall past times of laughter and play with women; yet he sees a householder or a householder's son enjoying himself provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not look upon a householder or his son indulging in sensual pleasures; yet he leads the celibate life aspiring to a certain heavenly realm, thinking: 'By this virtue, this observance, this austerity, or this celibate life, may I become some kind of god or celestial being!' He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. This too, brahmin, is a breach, a hole, a blemish, a stain in the celibate life. This is called one who leads an impure celibate life. Bound by the bondage of sexuality, he is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. He is not freed from suffering, I say."

—AN 7.50

Notice that if the hindrances were to function the way commonly believed, the last person wouldn't have an issue as long as he wasn't *at the moment* fantasizing about future sensual rewards. In reality, holding those not-so-secret intentions for the future is an obstruction *in the present*. That person is mentally welcoming sensuality *presently* by having such intentions at the back of their mind, and they would *presently* experience pushback from their mind if they tried to give them up.

**Mental Celibacy: The Decisive *and* Hardest Part**

The complete absence of sensual inclinations that is required to understand the Dhamma is certainly harder to achieve for someone who has not been celibate in body for very long, but, as shown by cases of laypeople like Anāthapiṇḍika, it is not impossible.

> *… Then the Holy One taught the householder Upāli step by step, with a discourse on generosity, virtue, and heaven.* ***He explained the peril, inferiority, and defilement of sensuality, and the benefit of renunciation. And, when he knew that Upāli's mind was ready, pliable, free from hindrances, elated, and confident,*** *he explained the special teaching of the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. Just as a clean cloth free from stains would properly absorb dye, so too, in that very seat, the stainless, immaculate eye of the Dhamma arose in Upāli: "Whatever has the nature of arising has the nature of ceasing." Then Upāli saw, attained, understood, and fathomed the Dhamma. He went beyond doubt, dispelled indecision, and became self-assured and independent of others regarding the Teacher's instructions. …*
>
> —MN 56

For your *citta* to be "like a clean cloth free from stains," what matters is not how recently you gave in to your desires, but that you are truly content and confident with celibacy and non-sensuality from now onwards—from the bottom of your *heart*, as it were, and not just as a means to an end. If your motivation for upholding celibacy and sense restraint is mere faith that they are necessary for Right View, and you would be secretly relieved if they were not required, then you still don't see the peril and inferiority of those things for yourself.

> … Then a second simile occurred to me. Suppose there was a green, sappy log, and it was lying on dry land far from the water. Then a man comes along with an upper fire stick, thinking to light a fire and produce heat. What do you think, Aggivessana? By drilling the stick against that green, sappy log on dry land far from water, could he light a fire and produce heat?"
>
> "No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it is still a green, sappy log, despite lying on dry land far from water. That man will eventually become weary and frustrated."
>
> "In the same way, there are ascetics and brahmins who live withdrawn in body and mind from sensuality, but they have not internally given up and allayed desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and burning for sensuality. Regardless of whether or not they feel violent, painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings, they are incapable of knowledge-and-vision, of supreme awakening. This was the second simile that occurred to me. …
>
> —MN 36

Now, this doesn't mean there is any sort of shortcut. It is precisely this celibacy of *intention*—which of course can only occur within actual physical celibacy—that people fear and are desperate to excuse themselves from.

It is not too rare to be able to spend long periods without sexual activity. It can be unpleasant, but for many it is tolerable if they can make up for it afterwards. But a single moment of a mental resolution to give up *all* sensual joys, with no end in sight, is unbearable for almost everyone.

Yet, for the mind to be prepared to see the Dhamma, it is that very resolution that needs to become a source of joy and confidence rather than fear. Why? Because if the mind is afraid to abandon sensuality completely, it is afraid of the Four Noble Truths. It is afraid of admitting what the true escape from suffering is, and that escape is what a *sotāpanna* has realized and understood how to develop even further.

All this being said, it is best not to rush it: the quicker you try to overcome the fear of renunciation and giving up, the more sharply you will have to confront it, and so the higher the chance that you will bite more than you can chew, get overwhelmed, and turn your back on the training. There is a reason we still remember the names of people like Anāthapiṇḍika and Visākhā: they were not representative of the average person even back then, let alone today.

So, by all means take it gradually if it's difficult, but don't start shifting the goalposts at any point.

**Complete and Permanent Freedom Are Not the Same**

Now, if all of this sounds like you need to become an *anāgāmi* to be free from hindrances, keep in mind that this is only because the idea of "suppressing" the hindrances—i.e., never actually freeing oneself from debt, illness, etc., but only having a break from their acute symptoms—is so taken for granted today that anything that challenges it sounds like an exaggeration.

Freedom from the hindrances *is* as profound and comprehensive as the Suttas portray it. But it does not automatically entail permanent freedom from that which produces unarisen hindrances. Namely, *ayoniso manasikāra*:

> And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen sense desire, and for the increase and expansion of arisen sense desire? There is the sign of attractiveness. Attention not through the origin with regard to that is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen sense desire, and for the increase and expansion of arisen sense desire.
>
> And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen aversion, and for the increase and expansion of arisen aversion? There is the sign of opposition. Attention not through the origin with regard to that it is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen aversion, and for the increase and expansion of arisen aversion.
>
> And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen indolence-and-lethargy, and for the increase and expansion of arisen indolence-and-lethargy? There is discontent, sloth, yawning, drowsiness after a meal, and sluggishness of mind. Attention not through the origin with regard to that is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen indolence-and-lethargy, and for the increase and expansion of arisen indolence-and-lethargy.
>
> And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen restlessness-and-anxiety, and for the increase and expansion of arisen restlessness-and-anxiety? There is disquietude of mind. Attention not through the origin with regard to that is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen restlessness-and-anxiety, and for the increase and expansion of arisen restlessness-and-anxiety.
>
> And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen doubt, and for the increase and expansion of arisen doubt? There are things that are grounds for doubt. Attention not through the origin with regard to that is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen doubt, and for the increase and expansion of arisen doubt. …
>
> —SN 46.51

Only noble understanding sets a limit on how far *ayoniso manasikāra* can still occur—until, for the Arahant, there is no room for it at all, and the mind stands completely beyond the hindrances (SN 54.12).

For the *puthujjana* at the other extreme, there is no limit whatsoever. This is why it is said that beings who develop their minds sufficiently to be reborn as Brahmā gods, completely transcending sensuality yet not understanding the Dhamma, eventually fall back down as low as the hells many eons later.

> "… Baka the Brahmā saw me coming off in the distance and said, 'Come, good sir! Welcome, good sir! It has been a long time since you took the opportunity to come here. For this is permanent, this is everlasting, this is eternal, this is complete, this is imperishable. For this is where there is no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or reappearing. And there is no other escape beyond this.'
>
> When he had spoken, I said to him, 'Alas, Baka the Brahmā is lost in ignorance! Alas, Baka the Brahmā is lost in ignorance! Because what is actually impermanent, not lasting, transient, incomplete, and perishable, he says is permanent, everlasting, eternal, complete, and imperishable. And where there is being born, growing old, dying, passing away, and reappearing, he says that there is no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or reappearing. And although there is another escape beyond this, he says that there is no other escape beyond this. …'
>
> —MN 49

The same principle operates within this life. Though the mind can here and now become *completely withdrawn* from sensual desire—not merely suppressing it—as long as the Dhamma has not been fully understood, that desire can still return. Not immediately, for otherwise it was never truly absent, but after a sufficient period of negligence.

> Friend, there is the case where a certain individual abides having entered upon the first jhāna. Thinking, "I am one who obtains the first jhāna," he dwells entangled with bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, laymen, laywomen, the king, the king's ministers, members of other sects and their disciples.
>
> Living entangled, bold, uninhibited, and devoted to chatter, passion invades his mind. With a mind invaded by passion, he returns to the inferior life having given up the training.
>
> Friend, suppose that heavy rain made the dust on a crossroads disappear and mud appear. Would one who says, "Now dust will never again appear in that crossroads?" be speaking rightly?
>
> 'No, friend. For people or cattle might walk on that crossroads, or wind and heat might exhaust the moisture. Then the dust would appear once more.'
>
> "In just this way, friend, there is the case where an individual abides having entered upon the first jhāna … Thinking, 'I am one who obtains the first jhāna,' he dwells entangled with bhikkhus … he returns to the inferior life having given up the training.
>
> —AN 6.60

For lay followers like Anāthapiṇḍika who attained *sotāpatti* after their first conversation with the Buddha, their Right View set a permanent limit on *ayoniso manasikāra*, but only enough to uproot personality-view, doubt, and the holding on to any sense of moral duty. As they lived engaged in worldly affairs, the freedom that allowed them to see the Dhamma faded, and celibacy ceased to be the natural inclination of their minds: unarisen hindrances arose once more.

Because they were satisfied with their attainment and thus complacent, they ceased to be celibate. Until that changed, they were no longer going "against the stream" and progressing further towards Arahantship.

> "Bhikkhus, there are these four kinds of individuals found in the world. What four?
>
> 1. One who goes with the stream,
> 2. one who goes against the stream,
> 3. one who stands firm,
> 4. and one who has crossed over and reached the far shore—a brahmin standing on dry ground.
>
> And what is the individual who goes with the stream?
> Here, bhikkhus, an individual enjoys sensual pleasures and does bad deeds. This is called the individual who goes with the stream.
>
> And what is the individual who goes against the stream?
> Here, bhikkhus, an individual does not enjoy sensual pleasures and does not do bad deeds. Even though he suffers, even though he is sorrowful, even with tearful face and weeping, he lives the complete and pure celibate life. This is called the individual who goes against the stream.
>
> And what is the individual who stands firm?
> Here, bhikkhus, an individual, with the ending of the five lower fetters, is one who reappears spontaneously and becomes extinguished there, not liable to return from that world. This is called the individual who stands firm.
>
> And what is the individual who has crossed over and reached the far shore—a brahmin standing on dry ground?
> Here, bhikkhus, an individual, with the destruction of the influxes, abides having entered upon

the liberation by mind and liberation by understanding that is devoid of influxes, having for himself comprehended and realized it right in the present experience. This is called the individual who has crossed over, reached the far shore—a brahmin standing on dry ground.

These, bhikkhus, are the four kinds of individuals found in the world."

Those who are unrestrained regarding sensual pleasures,
who are not free from lust, who live indulging in sensual enjoyments—
they go again and again to birth and aging,
overcome by craving, going with the stream.

Therefore the wise one, mindful here,
not pursuing sensual pleasures or evil deeds—
even in pain, he should give up sensual pleasures;
such an individual is called one who goes against the stream.

Whoever has abandoned the five defilements,
is a complete trainee, not subject to decline,
master of his mind, with faculties composed—
that man is called one who stands firm.

For him who, having comprehended the higher and lower states,
they are are dispelled, destroyed, and are no more—
that sage, who has lived the holy life,
gone to the world's end, is called one who has gone beyond.

—AN 4.5

## The Peril of Sensuality

**by Bhikkhu Anīgha**

**What The Buddha Actually Thought About Sensuality** Contrary to ideas often promoted in modern teachings, to say that the Buddha spoke disapprovingly of sensuality is an understatement:

"… And how has a bhikkhu seen sensuality in such a way that no underlying tendency for desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensuality underlies him?

Suppose there was a charcoal pit deeper than a man's height, filled with glowing coals that neither flamed nor smoked. Then a man would come along who wants to live and does not want to die, who desires happiness and is averse to suffering. Two strong men would grab him by the arms and drag him towards the charcoal pit. He would writhe and struggle to and fro. Why is that? For that man knows, 'If I fall in that charcoal pit, that will lead to my death or deadly pain.'

In the same way, when a bhikkhu has seen sensuality as a charcoal pit, no underlying tendency for desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensuality underlies him. …"

—SN 35.244

"… Is it true, Ariṭṭha, that you have such a pernicious view: 'As I understand the Buddha's teaching, the things he calls obstructions are not true obstructions for one who engages in them'?"

"Indeed, venerable sir. As I understand the Buddha's teaching, the things he calls obstructions are not true obstructions for one who engages in them."

**"Inept man, who on earth have you ever known me to teach the Dhamma like that?** Inept man, have I not said in many ways that obstructive things are obstructive, and that they truly obstruct one who engages in them? I have said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater. With the similes of a skeleton

… a scrap of meat … a grass torch … a pit of glowing coals … a dream … borrowed goods … fruit on a tree … a butcher's knife and chopping block … a staking sword … a snake's head, I have said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater. Even so, inept man, you misrepresent us with your misunderstanding, harm yourself, and create much demerit. This will be for your lasting harm and suffering."

Then the Buddha addressed the bhikkhus: "What do you think, bhikkhus? Is this bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, the former vulture catcher, warmed up at all in this teaching and discipline?"

"How could that be, venerable sir? Of course not, venerable sir."

When this was said, the bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, the former vulture catcher, sat silent, humiliated, with his trunk drooping, facing downwards, brooding and speechless.

Knowing this, the Buddha said, "Inept man, you will be known by your own pernicious view. I shall question the bhikkhus about this."

Then the Buddha said to the bhikkhus, "Bhikkhus, do you understand my teaching as this Ariṭṭha does, when he misrepresents us with his misunderstanding, harms himself, and creates much demerit?"

"No, venerable sir. For in many ways the Buddha has told us that obstructive things are obstructive, and that they truly obstruct one who engages in them. The Buddha has said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater. With the similes of a skeleton … a snake's head, the Buddha has said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater."

"Very good, bhikkhus! It is good that you understand my teaching like this. For in many ways I have said that obstructive things are obstructive …

I've said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater. But still this Ariṭṭha misrepresents us with his misunderstanding, harms himself, and creates much demerit. This will be for his lasting harm and suffering. Truly, bhikkhus, it is impossible to partake in sensuality without sensual desires, sensual perceptions, and sensual thoughts.

—MN 22

"If a novice should say this: 'As I understand the Buddha's teaching, the things he calls obstructions are not true obstructions for one who engages in them.'

That novice should be spoken to by the bhikkhus thus: 'Friend novice, do not say this. Do not misrepresent the Buddha. It is not good to misrepresent the Buddha. The Buddha would not speak thus. In many ways, friend novice, have obstructive things been called obstructive by the Buddha. They truly obstruct one who engages in them.'

And if that novice, being spoken to thus by the bhikkhus, should hold to that same view, that novice should be spoken to by the bhikkhus thus: 'From this day forth, friend novice, **you are not to refer to the Buddha as your Teacher.** And that which other novices receive—lodging for two or three nights with the bhikkhus—that is not for you. Away with you! Be gone!'

Whatever bhikkhu, knowing such a banished novice, should associate with him, or support him, or eat with him, or lie down together with him, it is an offense entailing confession."

—Bhikkhu Pācittiya 70[320]

**"Is This Sensuality?"**

Passionate intention is a man's sensuality.

[320] See also Sudinna's story at Pārājika 1.

The pretty things in the world aren't sensuality.

Passionate intention is a man's sensuality.

The pretty things in the world stay just as they are,

But the wise dispel desire there.

—AN 6.63

Sensuality isn't everything agreeable to your senses. There will be enjoyable things, even fully mundane ones, that are not sensuality. Conversely, there are things you might not at first glance associate with sensuality, yet they are because of your relationship with them.

Whether something is sensuality is determined by one question: how would you feel if you lost that thing, *forever*? If the mere thought fills you with dread, that thing is sensuality for you.

Seeing the peril in sensuality means seeing the peril in developing such passionate relationships with anything at all, animate or inanimate. Your passion is the problem, not the things themselves.

However, there is one thing where sensuality cannot be absent, which is why an Arahant is incapable of partaking in it. Namely, sexual intercourse:

A bhikkhu who has destroyed the taints cannot engage in sexual intercourse.

—AN 9.7

**The Danger** Someone who enjoys playing with venomous snakes doesn't need to reason out some novel, elaborate idea to recognize the danger; they just need to stop habitually looking past the acute danger to their own life that is *already there*. If they saw that clearly, any joy that activity could have offered would become utterly incapable of justifying engagement in it.

A man attracted to sensual pleasures,
When in that he finds success,
Surely becomes joyful
In gaining what he wished.

**But when for one so attracted—**
**One whose desire is aroused—**
**Those pleasures abandon him**
**It strikes him like a piercing dart.**

Whoever keeps clear of attractions
As his foot from a snake's head,
The entanglement in the world
he mindfully surmounts.

Whether fields, land, gold or cattle,
Horses, slaves, servants, women or family —
All varieties of attractions —
A man who covets these things,

Is overpowered by the powerless,
And crushed by difficulties;
Suffering goes along with him,
Like water in a cracked boat.

Therefore a person, always mindful,
should keep clear of attractions.
With these abandoned, they would cross the flood,
As one who reaches the far shore, having bailed out the boat.

—Sutta Nipāta 4.1

Imagine someone offers you that which you desire most, flawless in all respects. But they warn you: from the moment you accept it, it could be callously ripped away without warning; no amount of safety mechanisms you successfully create around the precious thing can fully remove that possibility.

This is precisely the threat that underlies every pleasure within the domain of the senses.

**Ignorance Is "Bliss"**

> "Bhikkhus, there are these five themes that should often be reflected upon by a woman or a man, by a householder or one gone forth. What five? (1) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to old age; I am not exempt from old age.' (2) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to illness; I am not exempt from illness.' (3) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to death; I am not exempt from death.' (4) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: **'I shall be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me.'** (5) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am the owner of my actions, the heir of my actions; I have actions as my origin, actions as my relative, actions as my resort; I will be the heir of whatever actions, good or bad, that I do.'
> —AN 5.57

The Buddha explicitly prescribed regular reflection on the impending separation from everything dear to you. But since people's "Buddhist practice" often revolves around anything but such reflections, they continue to ignore how they live under constant risk for the sake of transient joys.

> "… Suppose there was a dense forest grove not far from a town or village. And there was a tree laden with fruit, yet none of the fruit had fallen to the ground. And along came a man in need of fruit, wandering in search of fruit. Having plunged deep into that forest grove, he would see that tree laden with fruit. He would think: 'That tree is laden with fruit, yet none of the fruit has fallen to the ground. But I know how to climb a tree. Why don't I climb the tree, eat as much as I like, then fill my pouch?' And that is what he would do. And along would come a second man in need of fruit, wandering in search of fruit, carrying a sharp axe. Having plunged deep into that forest grove, he would see that tree laden with fruit. He would think: 'That tree is laden with fruit, yet none of the fruit has fallen to the ground. But I do not know how to climb a tree. Why don't I fell this tree at the root, eat as much as I like, then fill my pouch?' And so, he would fell the tree at the root. What do you think, householder? If the first man who climbed the tree does not quickly come down, when that tree fell, would he not break his hand, arm, or other limb, resulting in death or deadly suffering for him?"
>
> "Yes, venerable sir."
>
> "In the same way, a noble disciple reflects: 'With the simile of the fruit tree, the Buddha has said that sensuality gives little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater.' …"
>
> —MN 54

The disorienting array of options for replacing desirable things you lost, and for creating a false sense of safety around available ones, might seem like it mostly keeps the suffering and distress at bay. You can easily spend your entire life redirecting your passion from one thing to the next, with zero forced downtime prompting you to recognize the futility of the whole pattern.

But the danger in sensuality cannot be kept at bay by any amount of protections or replacements. It doesn't first come into being when something is lost; it exists *presently*, as the inseparable counterpart of passion.

*Even during the most joyful times, you **know** that the tree could fall.*

Even if you make no deliberate effort to reflect on it, you still *know* that losing things you love, or not getting them to begin with, is never fully off the table. Otherwise you wouldn't have that visceral instinct to protect them.

The inescapable uncertainty of things coupled with your passion for them means a constant undertone of anxiety. But since enjoying the fruits at the top while the tree hasn't fallen yet is the only happiness you know, the very straightforward escape from the threat seems so unpalatable that you might even refuse to consider it:

> Udāyi, there are these five avenues of sensuality. What five? Sights cognizable by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. Sounds cognizable by the ear … Smells cognizable by the nose … Tastes cognizable by the tongue … Touches cognizable by the body that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. These are the five avenues of sensuality.
>
> Udāyi, the pleasure and joy that arise based on these five avenues of sensuality is called sensual pleasure—the pleasure of excrement, the pleasure of ordinary people, the ignoble pleasure. **It is not to be partaken in, cultivated, or made much of.**
>
> ***I say that this pleasure ought to be feared.***
>
> —MN 66

**The Danger Must Become Apparent** It's not enough to give up sensuality as a calculated trade-off for the positive benefits of the practice, which leaves open the possibility to have both if only you could. Even if you've given it up outwardly, unless the connection between sensuality and acute peril is crystal-clear, a thread of passion towards it automatically remains. Strengthening your discernment of that connection is the one and only path to peace; any peace while that passion remains would feel like peace only to a leper who takes his condition entirely for granted.

> "Suppose, Māgandiya, there was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit. Then his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a physician to treat him. The physician would make medicine for him, and by means of that medicine the man would be cured of his leprosy and would become well and happy, independent, master of himself, able to go where he likes. Then two strong men would seize him by both arms and drag him towards a burning charcoal pit. What do you think, Māgandiya? Would that man twist his body this way and that?"
>
> "Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because that fire is indeed painful to touch, hot, and scorching."
>
> "What do you think, Māgandiya? Is it only now that the fire is painful to touch, hot, and scorching, or previously too was that fire painful to touch, hot, and scorching?"
>
> "Master Gotama, that fire is now painful to touch, hot, and scorching, and previously too that fire was painful to touch, hot, and scorching. For when that man was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, his faculties were impaired; thus, though the fire was actually painful to touch, he gained a mistaken perception of it as pleasant."
>
> "So too, Māgandiya, in the past sensuality was painful to touch, hot, and scorching; in the future sensuality will be painful to touch, hot, and scorching; and now at present sensuality is painful to touch, hot, and scorching. **But these beings who are not free from lust for sensuality, who are devoured by craving for sensuality, who burn with fever for sensuality, have broken faculties; thus, though sensuality is actually painful to touch, they gained a distorted perception of it as pleasant.**

> "Suppose, Māgandiya, there was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit; the more he scratches the scabs and cauterises his body, the fouler, more evil-smelling and more infected the openings of his wounds would become, yet he would find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in scratching the openings of his wounds. So too, Māgandiya, beings who are not free from lust for sensuality, who are devoured by craving for sensuality, who burn with fever for sensuality, still indulge in sensuality; the more such beings indulge in sensuality, the more their craving for sensuality increases and the more they are burned by their fever for sensuality, yet they find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in dependence on the five avenues of sensuality.
>
> "What do you think, Māgandiya? Have you ever seen or heard of a king or a king's minister enjoying himself, provided and endowed with the five avenues of sensuality, not having abandoned craving for sensuality, not having removed fever for sensuality, who could abide free from thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace, or who is able or who will be able to so abide?"—"No, Master Gotama."
>
> "Good, Māgandiya. I too have never seen or heard of a king or a king's minister enjoying himself, provided and endowed with the five avenues of sensuality, not having abandoned craving for sensuality, not having removed fever for sensuality, who could abide free from thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace, or who is able or who will be able to so abide. **On the contrary, Māgandiya, those recluses or brahmins who abided or abide or will abide free from thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace, all do so after having understood as they actually are the origin, the disappearance, the gratification, the danger, and the escape regarding sensuality, and it is after abandoning craving for sensuality and removing fever for sensuality that they abided or abide or will abide free from thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace."**
>
> —MN 75

There simply *could not be* an effective path to freedom from *dukkha*, regardless of time or culture, wherein the need to give up sensuality was anything less than absolute. Delight in sensuality requires an attitude of denial regarding the essence of the Dhamma: *liability to cessation that makes no exceptions*. Hence, without abandoning that delight, there is no room for the Right View.

## The Myth of Meditation Techniques

***By Bhikkhu Anīgha***

Modern Buddhist practice revolves around attentional exercises like staying with the breath, scanning bodily sensations, visualization, noting mental events. Even when these approaches are given a narrative that sounds faithful to early Buddhist ideals—as "means to restrain the mind and purify it from defilements"—closer scrutiny than they usually receive shows that they cannot achieve those aims.

The common thread behind these exercises is revealed by what happens when you stop them: the attitude that disturbance requires action, which is what craving is, remains intact. When sooner or later an issue arises and you cannot rely on a technique, you will feel the pull to act—whether by indulging defilements or reaching for relief through distraction. Meditation techniques are one more response, just an arbitrarily permissible one, within the same pattern that makes indulgence necessary to abandon: circumventing immediate suffering while guaranteeing its eventual return.

### Why Techniques Cannot Address Craving

These widespread attentional drills eliminate the only context in which craving can be exposed and undermined at its root: the friction that arises when an impulse presses for relief and no escape—neither in indulgence nor denial—is sought. Withstanding this unrelieved tension is what trains the mind to lose its compulsions altogether. Techniques get in the way of this training by shifting the effort from intentional,

reflective restraint to the performance of a separate activity, making non-compliance with lust and aversion a side effect rather than a conscious, unmediated effort. Like handing a spoiled child toys to quiet its tantrums instead of letting the spoiled habits themselves fade.

When techniques lead to behavioral change, they do so by shifting dependence from an outside engagement to an internal one. The core problem the Dhamma is meant to resolve, of needing to act in order to escape discomfort, has not changed. This very narrow escape route is shut when circumstances obstruct management rituals: illness, chaos, sudden triggers. Even if improved conduct is maintained lifelong, the dependence on diversion to deal with displeasure will have to manifest in behaviors besides spiritual management alone.

Moreover, the factual relief from *symptoms* makes devout practitioners of techniques unlikely to recognize and critically examine the pattern of lingering illness. If suffering resurfaces, they will attribute it to insufficient diligence or a need for minor adjustments in approach—not to the fundamental misdirection of their efforts. The problem is not that a palliative will always remain a palliative, but that it hasn't been applied well or long enough.

**"It's About the Insights"**

Practitioners of meditation techniques report realizations that feel transformative, often equating them with the attainments found in the Suttas. Yet these realizations share the same flaw as the practices that generate them: they are management tactics. They serve as sophisticated rationalizations, requiring recall and the aid of novelty during moments of turmoil to have an effect. By contrast, noble understanding does not need to be recalled or "applied." The inability for suffering to return in the first place is absolute and independent of a choice to maintain perspective:

> Thus have I heard:
>
> At one time, the Buddha was staying at Sāvatthi, in the Jeta Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍika's park.
>
> At that time, the Tathāgata said to the monks:
>
> "Suppose there is a lake, vast and long, fifty leagues wide and equally deep. If a man were to dip the tip of a single hair into that lake water, what do you think, monks? Which is greater, the water in the lake, or the single drop lifted by the man on the tip of a hair?"
>
> The monks said to the Buddha:
>
> "Tathāgata, the single drop lifted by the man on the tip of a hair is exceedingly small, while the lake water is immeasurably greater—a thousand, ten-thousand, a hundred-million times greater. There is no comparison."
>
> The Buddha said to the monks:
>
> "So it is for the disciple of the World-Honored One who possesses the vision of truth and is endowed with Right View. When a disciple realizes the fruit of truth with immediate and perfect understanding, they have without delay cut off and comprehended suffering. They have severed the root, just as a Tāla tree whose top has been cut **can never grow again.**
>
> The various sufferings they have severed are vast and immeasurable, like the water of that great lake, while the suffering that remains is like the drop of water on the tip of a hair."
>
> Having spoken this discourse, the monks, hearing what the Buddha taught, rejoiced and put it into practice.
>
> —Saṃyukta Āgama 891 (parallel to SN 13.1)

Noble attainments are not a novel way of relating to or dealing with suffering when it arises. When unmediated restraint has worn away craving itself and revealed its futile nature, the very same experiences that used to constitute suffering cease to be suffering at all. It's not that sense experience has been modified by some "perceptual shift," but that the *internal susceptibility* to forceful sense experiences, the ignorant call to action that made them emotionally compelling, is gone:

> Venerable sir, for a monk whose mind is thus rightly liberated, even if forceful sights cognizable by the eye … sounds cognizable by the ear … smells cognizable by the nose … tastes cognizable by the tongue … touches cognizable by the body … phenomena cognizable by the mental faculty come into the range of the eye … mental faculty, they do not overpower his mind (*citta*). His mind remains equally unmixed, steady, attained to imperturbability, and he is attuned to the impermanence of [that very mind].
>
> Venerable sir, it is as if there were a rocky mountain, without holes, without hollows, a single solid mass. Even if a heavy wind and rain should come from the east, west, north, or south, it would not shake it, would not rock it, would not make it tremble.
> —AN 6.55

> Here, monks, a monk is an Arahant, one with taints destroyed, who has completed the life of non-sensuality, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, with the fetters of being utterly destroyed, rightly liberated by understanding.
>
> His five faculties still stand; owing to their non-destruction, he undergoes the agreeable and the disagreeable, he experiences pleasure and pain. The destruction of passion, the destruction of aversion, the destruction of muddledness in him—this is called, monks, the Nibbāna-element with residue.
> —Itivuttaka 44

Meditation methods cannot produce this unconditional freedom because they work by managing sense experience itself—creating buffers, redirections, modifications to what is experienced. They shelter you from wind and rain rather than turning your mind into solid rock. Techniques, by their very mechanism, ensure that whatever relief comes will perish without constant maintenance:

> Monks, endowed with five qualities, a monk cannot attain right composure (*sammā-samādhi*) and abide in it. What five? It is when **a monk cannot endure sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches.** Endowed with these five qualities, a monk cannot abide having entered upon right composure.
>
> Endowed with five qualities, a monk can attain right composure and abide in it. What five? It is when a monk can endure sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. Endowed with these five qualities, a monk can abide having entered upon right composure.
> —AN 5.113

> Monks, an unlearned ordinary person speaks of the ocean. But that is not the ocean in the training of the Noble One. That is just a large body of water, a large sea of water. The eye [the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mental faculty], monks, is the ocean for a man, and its tide is made of sights [sounds, smells, tastes, touches, phenomena].
>
> One who **withstands** that tide is said to have crossed over the ocean of the eye, with its waves and whirlpools, its saltwater crocodiles and monsters. Crossed over, that true brahmin stands on dry land.
> —SN 35.228

The fact that they work by managing the appearance of suffering means that noble attainments cannot emerge from meditation techniques. The borrowing of phrases like "stream-entry" does not make those realizations match what was originally meant with those terms.

### The Gradual Training as the Actual "Method"

The widespread adoption of these palliative exercises is not incidental. It is the result of treating practices the Buddha taught only to renunciates as viable for everyone, and of granting leeway in behavioral purification when there ought to be none:

> "Is it possible, Master Gotama, to describe a sequential training, sequential progress, and sequential practice in this teaching-and-discipline?"

"It is possible, brahmin. Suppose a deft horse trainer were to obtain a fine thoroughbred. First of all, he would accustom it to wearing the bit. In the same way, when the Tathāgata obtains a man for training, he first guides him like this:

'Come, bhikkhu, be virtuous. Live restrained by the code of conduct, endowed with proper behavior and a suitable environment. **Seeing danger in the slightest fault,** train yourself in the training rules.'

When the monk is virtuous, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, guard your sense doors… do not grasp at signs and features [of signs, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, phenomena] … bring about the restraint of the mental faculty.'

When the monk has his sense doors guarded, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, be moderate in eating … eat only to sustain this body, to avoid harm, and to support the life of non-sensuality (*brahmacariya*).'

When the monk eats in moderation, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, be committed to vigilance. During the day and night, cleanse your mind of obstructive states while walking or sitting …'

When the monk is committed to vigilance, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, be possessed of recollectedness-and-awareness [in all postures and activities] …'

When the monk is possessed of recollectedness-and-awareness, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, frequent a secluded lodging …'

There, he sits down cross-legged and establishes recollectedness at the fore. He gives up these five hindrances, defilements of the mind that weaken understanding. Then, having thoroughly withdrawn from sensuality, having withdrawn from unbeneficial phenomena… he abides having entered upon the first jhāna… [and so on up to the fourth jhāna]."
—MN 107

The sequence is clear: what modern meditation methods aim to achieve—yet do not—comes after a multitude of prior steps that are hardly ever fulfilled. Crucially, no "technique" for cleansing the mind of hindrances is ever mentioned in the Suttas. Not having fulfilled the prior steps in itself implies you cannot abandon the hindrances even if you try; having fulfilled them means you know the way to overcome them and already weakened them greatly.

It is *because* of being deeply submerged in the hindrances and not knowing their escape that you would have flaws in your virtue, fail to restrain your sense faculties, etc. Conversely, there is no way to be accomplished in virtue, sense restraint, etc., without dealing with the hindrances internally: compliance with rules driven by external motives (such as enforced communal standards) does not train your virtue, much less the further stages.

What precedes *jhāna* is the removal of a minor degree of hindrances that remains for someone who not only emulated but *internalized* the prerequisites fully. This is why the sequence remains non-negotiable even when abandoning techniques entirely:

"'Now, between Sāvatthī and Sāketa seven chariots were stationed at the ready for me. Then, having departed Sāvatthī, I mounted the first chariot at the ready by the gate of the royal compound. The first chariot at the ready brought me to the second, where I dismounted and mounted the second chariot. … The second chariot brought me to the third … the fourth … the fifth … the sixth … The sixth chariot at the ready brought me to the seventh, where I dismounted and mounted the seventh chariot. The seventh chariot at the ready brought me to the gate of the royal compound of Sāketa.' That is how King Pasenadi should rightly reply."

"In the same way, venerable, **purification of virtue is only for the sake of purification of mind.** Purification of mind is only for the sake of purification of view."
—MN 24

> Venerables, if there be a monk who violates the precepts, breaks the precepts, breaches the precepts, punctures the precepts, defiles the precepts, or blackens the precepts, yet desires to rely on the precepts to establish virtue—using virtue as a ladder to ascend to the Hall of Unsurpassed Wisdom and the Pavilion of the True Dhamma—ultimately, this is impossible.
>
> Venerables, it is like a multi-storied lookout or terraced pavilion situated not far from a village, wherein a ladder is placed, or ten steps or twelve steps are set. If a person comes, seeking and wishing to ascend that hall or pavilion, yet without treading upon the first step of this ladder, wishes to tread upon the second step—ultimately, this is impossible. If they do not tread upon the second step, yet wish to ascend the third or fourth, up to ascending the hall or pavilion—ultimately, this is impossible …
> —Madhyama Āgama 80

**"But the Buddha Taught *Ānāpānasati, Satipaṭṭhāna …*"** The methods contemporarily branded as *ānāpānasati*, *satipaṭṭhāna*, *brahmavihāra*, etc., are not what the teachings in the Suttas refer to. Those instructions presuppose being already free from the need that their modern replicas address—the impulse to respond to the unwholesome with distraction:

> Monk, **when your mind is internally steady, well settled, and arisen unbeneficial phenomena are not able to obsess it**, then, monk, you should train thus: "I shall cultivate the liberation of mind through friendliness (*mettā*). I shall make much of it, make it a vehicle, make it a basis, practice it, grow it, and properly undertake it." This, monk, is how you should train …
>
> You should train thus: "I shall abide with perspective of the body within the body [feelings within feelings, mind within mind, phenomena within phenomena], ardent, aware, and recollected, having dispelled longing and distress in regard to the world." This, monk, is how you should train …
>
> —AN 8.63

As passages like the following show, the foundation—"your mind is internally steady, well settled, and arisen unbeneficial phenomena are not able to obsess it"—is established not by any contemplative practice, but by prior training in correct restraint, which in itself steadies the mind:

> "Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfill knowledge and release?"
>
> "The seven factors of awakening, Kuṇḍaliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfill knowledge and release."
>
> "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the seven factors of awakening?"
>
> "The four establishments of recollectedness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), when developed and cultivated, fulfill the seven factors of awakening."
>
> "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the four establishments of recollectedness?"
>
> "The three kinds of proper conduct, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the four establishments of recollectedness."
>
> "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the three kinds of proper conduct?"
>
> "Restraint of the sense faculties, when developed and cultivated, fulfills the three kinds of proper conduct.
>
> And how, Kuṇḍaliya, is restraint of the sense faculties developed and cultivated so that it fulfills the three kinds of proper conduct? Here, **having seen a pleasing sight with the eye, a monk does not long for it, or become excited, or generate passion. His body is steady and his mind is steady, internally well settled and well released. Having seen a displeasing sight with the eye,**

**he is not dismayed, not daunted, not dejected, without a mind of ill will. His body is steady and his mind is steady, internally well settled and well released.** *[and so on for the remaining five senses]*.

When having seen a sight with the eye, a monk's body is steady and his mind is steady, internally well settled and well released in regard to both pleasing and displeasing sights; when, having heard a sound with the ear … smelled an odor with the nose … tasted a taste with the tongue … experienced a touch with the body … cognized a phenomenon with the mental faculty, a monk's body is steady and his mind is steady, internally well settled and well released in regard to both pleasing and displeasing phenomena, then his restraint of the sense faculties has been developed and cultivated in such a way that it fulfills the three kinds of proper conduct.

And how, Kuṇḍaliya, are the three kinds of proper conduct developed and cultivated so that they fulfill the four establishments of recollectedness? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, having abandoned bodily misconduct, a monk develops proper bodily conduct; having abandoned verbal misconduct, he develops proper verbal conduct; having abandoned mental misconduct, he develops proper mental conduct. It is in this way that the three kinds of proper conduct are developed and cultivated so that they **fulfill the four establishments of recollectedness.**"

—SN 46.6

Monks, without abandoning six things, one is incapable of abiding with perspective of the body within the body internally … the body externally … the body internally and externally … feelings internally … feelings externally … feelings internally and externally … the mind internally … the mind externally … the mind internally and externally … phenomena internally … phenomena externally … phenomena internally and externally.

What are the six? Delight in work, delight in talk, delight in sleep, delight in company, not guarding the sense faculties, and lack of moderation in eating.
—AN 6.118

**The Training That Uproots** The unresolved friction of not following unwholesome pulls is what trains the mind to be "internally well settled." Any practice whose goal is to remove this friction can only *prevent* the development of virtue, turning what would by itself have led to significant internal transformation into mere rule-keeping that eventually collapses when artificial buffers are taken away.

When you refuse both indulgence and distraction from defilements, you will be faced with the pain of unrelieved craving. And that's the point: that craving is there now because whenever you were in the same situation in the past, you unthinkingly made the wrong choice. By indulging or distracting yourself, you gave in to craving against the pain of craving, thereby adding fuel to the very same fire.

Each time craving arises and you neither follow it nor seek means to appease it, the expectation that this craving must be answered weakens. The craving comes, presses with its characteristic urgency, and… nothing happens. It eventually subsides on its own, having been unable to bait you. As you train in this whenever you're pressured by something unwholesome, the association between craving and necessity to act breaks down. When the association has worn away entirely, craving itself has no space to exist, and that's the only safe form of relief. As much as techniques suppress specific instances of misconduct, by taking this root association as a given, they maintain the propensity for sensual and hateful acts.

The Gradual Training eliminates the appeal of both indulgence and meditation techniques. It trains the mind to withstand the pull toward the unwholesome without consolations, until craving itself subsides. The mind that has tasted the removal of craving rather than its management will only feel encumbered by diversionary measures to tackle whatever impurities remain.